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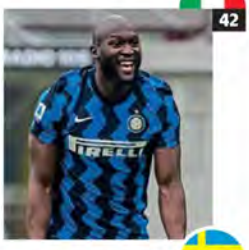

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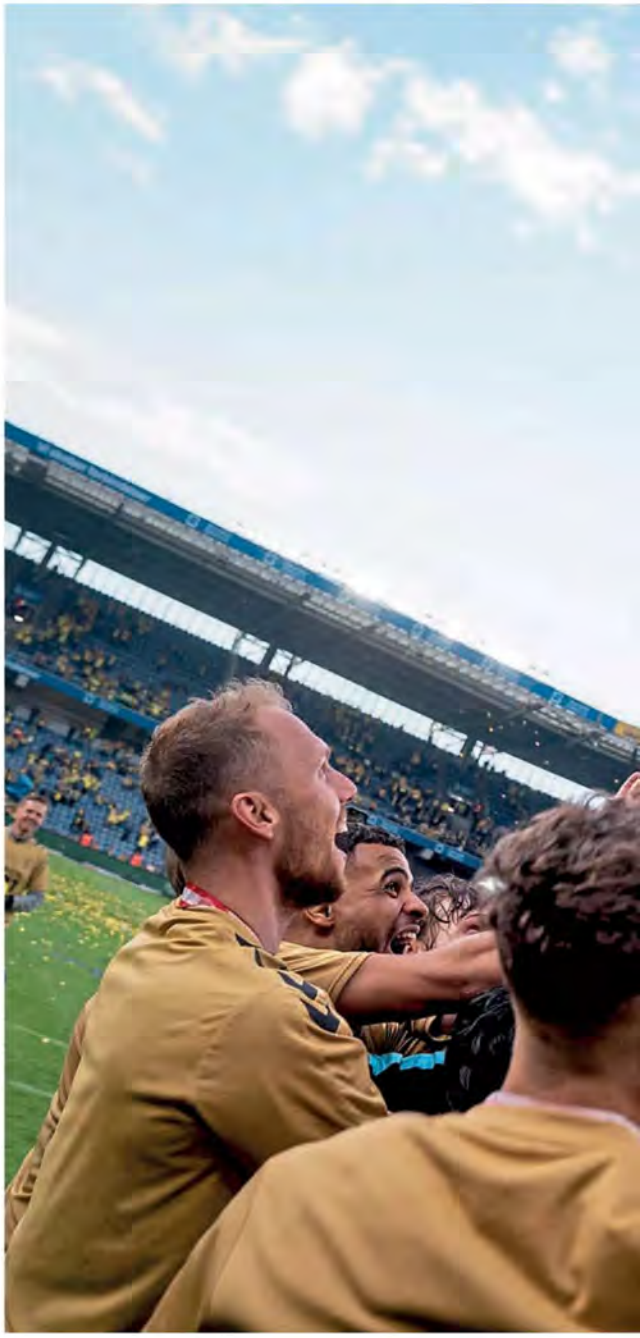

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FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR

Even fans of Atletico Madrid, Lille, Internazionale and Villarreal, who have all seen their teams achieve great success, might have been forgiven for breathing a sigh of relief at the end of the 2020-21 domestic season. Empty stadiums, combined with a relentless schedule that pushed players to their absolute limits, meant that for large parts of the season, it just didn't quite feel the same.

And yet, in such a bleak year, football often found a way to shine a light through the gloom; whether as a distraction from depressing news stories by injecting a rare thrill of excitement, or even just providing a sense of routine as the days stretched on from one lockdown to the next.

So yes, in many ways it was a miserable season, but to borrow an expression from *Father Ted*'s Mrs Doyle: "Maybe we like the misery."

In a bleak year, football often found a way to shine a light through the gloom

As usual, we've asked our best people to summarise Europe's major leagues, as well as the Champions League and Europa League finals (pages 32-49). Thanks in particular are due to our resident French football expert Howard Johnson, who is hanging up his *World Soccer* boots. Howard has been a terrific servant to the magazine for the last 20 years, and will be difficult to replace.

Thanks also to you, the reader, for sticking with us throughout the last year. This issue completes a full cycle of issues since *World Soccer* joined the Kelsey Media family, and from a personal perspective it has been a pleasure and privilege to be a part of. We hope you've enjoyed reading the magazine as much as we've enjoyed working on it.

Jamie Evans, Assistant Editor

SOUTH AMERICA

Copa chaos

The 2021 edition of the Copa America, due to be co-hosted by Colombia and Argentina, has been plunged into chaos.

In the midst of civil unrest and protests against the government, Colombia requested a delay to the competition but, having already waited an extra year for the tournament because of the pandemic, CONMEBOL rejected the proposal and stripped them of their hosting rights.

A spike in COVID-19 cases and a nine-day lockdown then saw Argentina stripped of the tournament too. The possibility of moving games to the United States was briefly considered – in spite of the country hosting the CONCACAF Gold Cup later this summer – but CONMEBOL eventually decided to move the competition to Brazil, hosts of the last edition in 2019. The decision, labelled "insane" by many pundits, has been met with widespread criticism – Brazil has registered the second-highest coronavirus death toll in the world, and protests have been staged across the nation over president Jair Bolsonaro's management of the COVID-19 crisis.

ITALY

Conte leaves Inter

Antonio Conte has stepped down from his role as coach of Internazionale – just weeks after sealing the club's first Serie A title in 11 years.

"We've all given it our all, but our all was not enough to secure any accountability for the 96 unlawful deaths on British soil"

Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham, after two ex-police officers and an ex-solicitor, accused of perverting the course of justice, were acquitted in the Hillsborough inquiry

Holders...Brazil won the title in 2019 as hosts

The club's financial difficulties are at the root of Conte's departure. Earlier this year, Suning – the Chinese company that bought Inter in 2016 – oversaw the demise of Jiangsu FC, with the club ceasing operations just months after winning the Chinese Super League.

Liquidation is not on the horizon for the Italian giants, thanks to a €275 million loan secured before the end of the season. However, funds will need to be raised and, after Conte was told that he would have to recoup as much as €80m in transfer fees this summer while also reducing the wage bill by 20 per cent, he decided to walk away.

As the news was leaked, many Inter fans led protests against club president Steven Zhang, although they have reportedly been given assurances that players will not be sold cheaply. Under usual circumstances, the likes of Milan Skriniar, Alessandro Bastoni, Nicolo Barella, Romelu Lukaku and Lautaro Martinez would command sizeable fees, but with incomes down across Europe due to COVID, buying clubs may be looking for bargains.

Departing... Antonio Conte

HEROES & VILLAINS

Legend...Buffon celebrates with his Juve team-mates

GIANLUIGI BUFFON

In 1999, Buffon won the Coppa Italia as a fresh-faced 21-year-old in a Parma side featuring Italy striker Enrico Chiesa. When the 43-year-old won it this year with Juventus, the winner was scored by 23-year-old Federico Chiesa, son of Enrico. Buffon: the cross-generational man.

SAPIR BERMAN

In May, the referee took charge of her first match since coming out as transgender. "This is the first step in a long and wonderful journey," the Israel Football Association said on Twitter. "Sapir, we are proud to do it with you." Berman, 26, was already a well-established official in the Israeli Premier League before officiating the clash between Beitar Jerusalem and Hapoel Haifa.

MARCUS RASHFORD

For what feels like the 1,000th time this season: credit to Manchester United's Marcus Rashford. In May, the England forward became the youngest person to top the *Sunday Times'* Giving List, having donated £20m to food, poverty and community charities – a sum greater than his own personal wealth.

AJAX

Instead of putting their latest Eredivisie trophy into the cabinet alongside the other 34, Ajax chose instead to melt it down and turn it into 42,000 silver stars – one for each of their season ticket holders. The Dutch champions wanted to give something back to supporters. "We have felt their support every week on the way to the stadium, on social media and in our personal contacts," said chief executive Edwin van der Sar. "Previously, when we said: 'This title is for you', we were expressing how we were doing it for the fans. However, sharing the trophy is the ultimate proof that we really are."

FIFA

FIFA's relentless pursuit of bad ideas showed no sign of slowing down, as president Gianni Infantino lent his support to a suggestion from the Saudi Arabian Football Federation to stage the World Cup every two years instead of four. "You don't need to be an Einstein to know that if you have the World Cup every two years you double the revenue," said Infantino. A proposal to conduct a feasibility study into the idea was passed at FIFA's annual Congress.

YOUSSEF EL-ARABI

Shortly after topping the Greek scoring charts en route to firing Olympiakos to the league title, the 34-year-old was sentenced to three years – two of them suspended – in prison in France. The Moroccan was convicted of beating two teenagers in 2017, after the two boys threw glass bottles onto a terrace that he owned.

ZOO FC

The Kericho-based team were expelled from the Kenyan top flight and sent down to the third tier after being found guilty of match-fixing by a FIFA investigation. The report claimed that several games between 2018 and 2020 were "deemed to have been manipulated" by figures at the club. In response, the club tweeted: "We are prepared to exhaust all legal avenues to ensure this unfair decision is reversed, including... appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sports."

JENS LEHMANN

The former Germany, Dortmund and Arsenal goalkeeper was sacked from his role on Hertha Berlin's board after referring to TV pundit Dennis Aogo as a "token black guy". Club president, Werner Gegenbauer, said: "Such statements in no way correspond to the values for which Hertha BSC stands and actively campaigns."

Jens Lehmann...Sky Germany have since distanced themselves from the pundit

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

The European Super League: different names, same plot

Silvio Berlusconi, some 30 years ago, sat in the boardroom of his grand villa at Arcore outside Milan and expounded for *World Soccer* and this writer exactly how the big clubs were about to take over international football.

For Berlusconi, international football was moribund, a curiosity only for the history books. Tomorrow belonged to him and his like: rich owners of both their clubs and the burgeoning new world of cash-rich commercial television, which had pushed state broadcasters into penurious retreat.

Milan were then the finest team in the world: Franco Baresi, Ruud Gullit, Marco van Basten, Frank Rijkaard, et al. But the players aged, titles were lost and with it Berlusconi's enthusiasm for his toy. Football had served its purpose as a platform for grander ambitions that secured three terms as Italy's prime minister.

Berlusconi sat halfway down a relentless timeline leading towards a Super League. His significance was in bringing not only energy but a high personal profile to the project. He also enjoyed perfect timing: the early 1990s saw UEFA ape the FIFA model for TV and sponsorship exclusivity and convert the ground-breaking European Cup into the Champions League.

UEFA, ever since launching the Champions League, has had to run to stay one step ahead of the big clubs' voracious financial appetite. Hence today's elite club world with its multi-million cash pursuit driven by an unchecked player wages spiral and, latterly, the COVID-19 shutdown.

Man with a plan ... Milan president Silvio Berlusconi.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW FROM KEIR RADNEDGE IN MILAN

WAVE THE WORLD CUP GOODBYE

Berlusconi...the then-Milan owner made his claims to *World Soccer* back in 1992

and wanted more – more matches, more competition, more profile, more income. Hence the creation of the Football League, then professionalism and pursuit of the necessary funding.

Preston chairman Major William Sudell, in importing players from Scotland, was one of Berlusconi's football/business forebears. Another

> However many ways UEFA devised to slice the pie, the big clubs always wanted more

All of this is nothing new – the hastily-collapsed Super League being merely the latest chapter in expansionist dreams which can be traced all the way to the founding of the Football League in 1888.

Different names, same plot. The original clubs had become addicted to the competitive drug of the FA Cup was millionaire housing developer Sir Henry Norris, the Arsenal chairman who found Woolwich too small for his ambitions. So he shifted the Gunners lock, stock and smoking barrel north across the River Thames.

Accelerated rail travel provided clubs in central Europe (Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Italy, etc.) with the means to launch the Mitropa Cup in the late 1920s. The two-leg knockout competition took its nickname from the Mitropa (Mittel Europa/Central Europe) sleeper trains. Not a league yet, but it was a start.

End-of-season tournaments, such as the Latin Cup, grew in popularity after World War II and sparked the creation of the European Cup in 1955.

Note that the tournament was devised not by UEFA but by the media: to be precise, the French sports daily *L'Equipe*. Editor Gabriel Hanot and colleagues Jacques Ferran and Jacques de Ryswick sit directly in that Super League timeline between Sudell and Berlusconi.

The European Cup pioneers quickly understood the value of remaining among the elite. Hence the holders were granted a right to compete the

next season even if they were no longer domestic champions. Without that fail-safe, Real Madrid would not have achieved their inspiring and all-conquering quintet of crowns. Similarly, subsequent trebles would have been beyond both Johan Cruyff's Ajax and Franz Beckenbauer's Bayern Munich.

Serious debate about Super Leagues took off in the 1960s. The excitement surrounding Tottenham's Cup-winners Cup clashes with Rangers prompted forecasts of the "Old Firm" making up a UK league. Simultaneously the feasibility of a "real" European league was aroused, notably in these pages by Brian Glanville back in 1964.

Even the original grainy-grey TV pictures of Real Madrid, Barcelona, Benfica, Milan, etc. had opened a window for supporters and officials onto the vast new future spreading at their feet.

That is where the debate remained – in the media and boardrooms of envy – until Berlusconi came along. To be fair, if it had not been Berlusconi then it would have been another media mogul. He was merely the first to seize on the financial potential blown open for football by a televisual revolution empowered by satellite and cable technology.

Berlusconi's Canale 5 pointed the way in Italy just as Rupert Murdoch flexed his Sky muscles in the UK and the Premier League embarked on its own domestic breakaway from the Football League.

Berlusconi envisaged that national team football would wither and die as the newly-refinanced club game branched out all over the world. Fans might even be handed free admission to matches because the crowd atmosphere was such an essential contributor to the tele-football experience.

Simultaneously the fragmentation of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia propelled UEFA's membership from 35 towards its current 55. The new nations demanded their own right of access to European competition and its financial pie. The worried "old guard" pressed UEFA for the security of a guaranteed presence.

UEFA met this twin challenge by converting the historic European Cup into the Champions League. More clubs, more matches, more money.

However many ways UEFA devised to slice the pie, the big clubs always wanted more. Berlusconi commissioned the Milan-based Media Partners agency to devise a Super League format. He brought other big clubs on board: Ajax, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund, Inter, Juventus, Liverpool, Manchester United, Milan, Marseille, Porto and Real Madrid.

UEFA duly came up with more money, which the clubs blew in an international transfer market fired up by the free-for-all – an unintended consequence of the 1995 Bosman Ruling.

One sphere in which Berlusconi was demonstrably wrong was in predicting the end of international football. If anything, the European clubs' militancy forced FIFA and UEFA to ramp up the visibility and financial attraction of their respective World Cup and European Championship.

A key factor in maintaining a new balance had been the creation of an interlocking international match calendar by FIFA under Sepp Blatter (not all of Blatter's ideas were bad ones).

In 2013 a new Super League proposal emerged from a meeting of minds between Galatasaray president Unal Aysal and Juventus' Andrea Agnelli. Unal claimed the support of between 15 to 20 clubs, including Manchester United, Paris Saint-Germain and Real Madrid. Again, UEFA came up with more money and the idea went back into cold storage.

Not for long. In 2017 FIFA, now headed by Gianni Infantino, decided to cut in on the act by expanding the Club World Cup to 24 teams (12 from Europe).

Separately, according to revelations from the *Football Leaks* outlet, Bayern Munich and "the most powerful and richest clubs in Europe" began plotting a breakaway from UEFA in 2021. Founder members were named as Arsenal, Bayern Munich, Barcelona, Chelsea, Juventus, Liverpool, Manchester City, Paris Saint-Germain, Manchester United, Milan and Real Madrid, plus invitees Atletico Madrid, Borussia Dortmund, Inter, Marseille and Roma.

All sound familiar?

The latest Super League rose and fell even faster than all the previous proposals. But bear in mind the aphorism of philosopher Jorge Santayana: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Football has a short memory.

EIGHTEEN WORLD SOCCER, February, 1964

BRIAN GLANVILLE says that this is inevitable...

ECONOMIC REALITY WILL FORCE EUROPEAN LEAGUE

GRADUALLY, hesitatingly, we are approaching that mirage, a European League. If we get it, it will be largely because the cold blasts of economic reality force it on us, rather than through any initiative of our own. For who expects initiative from the Football League? The Football League, which frightened Chelsea out of entering for the European Cup, which failed to frighten Manchester United, but took a mean consolation by preventing United from accepting an extra invitation in 1958, after the Munich disaster? The Football Association would lead if they could, but their position here is subordinate and secondary.

In the meantime, we have discussions about that superfluity, that flaccid halfway house, a British Super League; about which, of course, there would be nothing super at all. Scotland have Rangers and Celtic to offer; no more. Rangers, the club which plays year after year in European competition without, apparently, learning a thing, would be worth a place if only for the massive consistency of the support they attract. So would Celtic — who have surprised everyone by their progress in the European Cup-winners'

Foresight...Brian Glanville was discussing a European League way back in 1964

BOOKS THIS MONTH

THE BEAUTIFUL HISTORY
By Martyn Routledge, Elspeth Wills and Adam Forster (Pitch Publishing, £16.99)

The Beautiful History charts the fascinating story of Britain through football club badges. From Premier League giants to non-league sides, it features over 100 clubs, with each badge coming alive to reveal the story behind it, whilst also giving events in history an exciting and engaging twist as it takes you on a footballing journey from the dinosaurs to the digital age.

THE GREAT PIE REVOLT
by Jack Peat (Pitch Publishing, £12.99)

Few things convey the identity of Britain's towns and cities more vocally than football and food, yet put them together and they become incompatible foes. *The Great Pie Revolt* is the definitive guide to the cafes, takeaways, market stalls, microbrewers, pubs and bars that pride themselves on their locality. It is proof that when paired properly, football and food are a match made in heaven, but both are in dire need of a spectator-driven revolt.

Jonathan WILSON
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

The flawed genius of Pep Guardiola

Before Pep Guardiola took charge of Barcelona in 2008, nobody believed it was possible to play elite European football in the way you might play a five-a-side: holding possession, dragging the opposition around the pitch, trying to work openings. Thirteen years on, his approach is so accepted as a standard way of playing that there has been a counter-revolution. And now, in the season just finished, a synthesis seems to have emerged, led by Guardiola himself.

After the years when the game, at the highest level, was about retaining possession, Jurgen Klopp and the German school came to the fore by regaining it. But this season, Guardiola's Manchester City won the league and Thomas Tuchel's Chelsea won the Champions League with a form of football that balanced pressing and possession, that operated a high line without being overly vulnerable to balls played into the space behind it.

So close...Pep Guardiola is still waiting for his third Champions League trophy

There is, of course, one enormous caveat, which is that 2020-21 was not in any sense a normal season. A lack of pre-season and the compressed nature of the calendar had a major effect on how football was played. First there was the wildness and the chaos of those early weeks of the Premier League season, as City conceded five, Manchester United conceded six and Liverpool conceded seven. Then there was the retrenchment, so that in the end the average goals-per-game for the season was 2.69, fractionally down on the previous season.

And at the heart of that were City, rising from eighth in mid-December to have made the title inevitable by the end of March. In Ruben Dias they had, as Alex Ferguson once said of Nemanja Vidic, a defender who could defend: a player capable of rotating possession who also excelled in the more traditional virtues of heading and marking. The benefits were seen especially in that Champions League semi-final against Paris Saint-Germain as bodies were hurled into the way of shots. Guardiola had gone from being a coach who insisted he didn't coach tackles to having a team that actively celebrated Oleksandr Zinchenko blocking a shot from Neymar.

> The revelation of the line-up in Porto was one of those jaw-drop moments: he'd done it again

But just as everybody prepared to celebrate a great Guardiola side, his third Champions league success after a ten-year gap, and one that, being so hard won, might have meant even more than those glorious triumphs achieved with Barcelona in 2009 and 2011, he fell victim to the flaw that has undone him so often in the past.

The revelation of the line-up in Porto was one of those jaw-drop moments: he'd done it again.

Since 2015, when Guardiola sent his Bayern out with a back three to push high against Barcelona, he has made a habit of bizarre line-ups. It's as though Barcelona's (incredibly unfortunate) defeat to Chelsea in 2012 and Bayern's to Real Madrid in 2014 made him fear being caught in the counter-attack so much that

Repeat of history... In 2015 Guardiola fielded a back three against Barcelona

he felt he had to take specific measures to avoid it. But those steps, paradoxically, were precisely what brought about his doom.

It happened in his use of Ilkay Gundogan wide against Liverpool in 2018. It happened in his deployment of a back three against Lyon last year. And it happened again in Porto, in the most direct of ways, as Mason Mount's pass to Kai Havertz for the goal went precisely through the space in front of the back four where Fernandinho or Rodri may have been expected to have been covering. Gundogan, the notional holding player, was still only just crossing the halfway line.

And what made the line-up all the more remarkable was how Guardiola had seemed to have worked out how to balance a hard press with cover for the high line. His City through the late winter did not press quite so aggressively as they had. They retained possession better. They managed usually to keep five men behind the ball. And then, having achieved that great breakthrough, he threw it away in the biggest game of all, against a coach who, of all those of the now dominant German school, has been the most influenced by him.

Tuchel's Chelsea conceded only two goals in seven Champions League knockout games, an extraordinary transformation from the Chelsea who had been notorious for conceding on the counter under Frank Lampard. They too temper their pressing by holding possession, and achieve a basic solidity by protecting their back three with two holders – one of them the phenomenon that is N'Golo Kante. That might be too predictable for the long term, but in his first half season at the club it worked.

And that is the enigma of Pep Guardiola. He has shaped modern football more profoundly than anybody, and yet misfortune and a couple of key defeats have bred an insecurity that leads him to undermine himself in key games. All geniuses need their flaws, and that is his.

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Seven-a-side... Rionegro line up for their game

1 SEVEN-A-SIDE

In what is believed to be a footballing first, a Colombian league game saw Rionegro Aguilas take to the field with just seven players. Rionegro had several players injured and 15 out with COVID-19, but the league ruled that the game still had to go ahead. Despite this obvious handicap (the opposition had a full quota of players) and the fact that Aguilas had their reserve goalie starting in defence alongside another professional debutant, they heroically managed to shut opponents Chico out for almost 60 minutes, before eventually succumbing to a 3-0 defeat.

2 MORE COLOMBIAN CHAOS

Colombia has been witness to plenty of chaotic scenes in recent weeks. During Atletico Mineiro's Copa Libertadores visit to America de Cali, protesters clashed with police outside the Romelio Martinez Stadium in Barranquilla with the sound of explosions and sirens echoing throughout the game. Tear gas was used by police during the clashes, which was then breathed in by the players. Although the game was interrupted on no fewer than eight separate occasions, the referee insisted against abandoning the action, with the Brazilian visitors eventually winning 3-1. "This was the worst thing I ever lived through," said Atletico Mineiro coach, Cuca. "We couldn't stay on the pitch because every part of us hurt. The eyes, the throat, the nose."

3 SIGN LANGUAGE

In a year of empty stadiums, managers and players have got used to the novelty of being able to hear each other without their shouts and instructions being drowned out by the crowd. So with 8,000 fans in attendance for Brondby's Danish Superliga clash with Midtjylland, coach Niels Frederiksen had to take matters into his own hands by writing the words "KEEP ATTACKING" on a whiteboard and showing it to his players. "I could not get in touch with my players," he said after the game, "so I decided to send one of my assistants in and write on the sign so everyone could see it." Despite being humorously mocked on social media and becoming somewhat of a meme, the ploy worked: Brondby won 3-1.

4 A LUCKY ESCAPE

Pre-match preparation is everything, so Rentistas midfielder Francisco Duarte having to escape a fire in his hotel room the night before a Copa Libertadores tie with Argentine side Racing Club was less than ideal. "I saw that there was a lot of black smoke and I felt the heat," said Duarte. "I went to the window and opened it. There is a ledge there and that allowed me to go out and lean against the frame with my knees and hold on to the window with my hands," said Duarte. Unsurprisingly, the Uruguayan side went on to lose 3-0.

5 DEADPOOL DZYUBA

For the second season in a row, Artem Dzyuba has topped the Russian Premier League scoring charts as Zenit St. Petersburg lifted their third national league title in a row, and the veteran frontman marked the occasion in style – by collecting his medal dressed as the title character from the film *Deadpool*. The striker took to the stage with his son, who was presumably thrilled by his dad's choice of outfit.

Zenit superhero... Artem Dzyuba with his son

"Thanks Antonio. You changed me as a player and made me stronger...and we won together! I'm glad I've had you as a coach. I'll take your principles for the rest of my career. I owe you a lot"

Internazionale striker Romelu Lukaku says goodbye to Antonio Conte

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

Liverpool new boy... Ibrahima Konate

Returning...Tom Heaton

EUROPE

As well as **SERGIO AGUERO** (page 22), Barcelona completed the free transfer of **ERIC GARCIA** (Manchester City) and exercised their £7.8m buy-back option on **EMERSON ROYAL** (Real Betis).

DAVID ALABA joined Real Madrid after his Bayern Munich contract expired. Milan signed Lille goalkeeper **MIKE MAIGNAN** to replace the outbound Gianluigi Donnarumma, while Liverpool captured RB Leipzig centre-back **IBRAHIMA KONATE** for £36m.

Manchester United snapped up Aston Villa goalkeeper **TOM HEATON**, 19 years after signing him as a trainee. **THEO WALCOTT** joined Southampton permanently from Everton, newly-promoted Watford signed **IMRAN LOUZA** from Nantes, while Manchester City signed Fluminense wonderkid **KAYKY** and **DARIO SARMIENTO** from Estudiantes.

Barca arrival... Sergio Aguero

FASHION SAKALA joined Rangers from Belgian side Oostende, while **MALKY MACKAY** replaced John Hughes as manager of Ross County.

RUI VITORIA replaced Domenico Tedesco as manager of Russian Premier League runners-up Spartak Moscow.

SOUTH AMERICA

Sao Paulo signed former Independiente winger **EMILIANO RIGONI** from Zenit St. Petersburg.

CONCACAF

FLORIAN THAUVIN followed in the footsteps of Andre-Pierre Gignac by leaving Marseille to join Tigres in Mexico.

ASIA

ADAM LE FONDRE returned to Sydney FC after a spell in India with Mumbai City. Elsewhere, former Crystal Palace defender **TONY POPOVIC** was appointed Melbourne Victory coach.

JOSE MORAIS took charge of Saudi champions Al Hilal, making ex-Porto striker **MOUSSA MAREGA** his first signing, before making way for coach **LEONARDO JARDIM** a month later.

AFRICA

HUGO BROOS was appointed South Africa coach, **PAULO DUARTE** replaced Claude Le Roy as Togo boss and **HECTOR CUPER** took charge of DR Congo.

EUROPE'S TOP 5 LEAGUES MANAGERIAL MOVEMENTS

David Guion
Left Reims
Thierry Laurey
Left Strasbourg
Julien Stephan
Joined Strasbourg
Stephane Moulin
Left Angers
Gerald Baticle
Left Lyon (assistant) for Angers
Michel Der Zakarian
Left Montpellier
Rudi Garcia
Left Lyon
Peter Bosz
Joined Lyon
Adrian Ursea
Left Nice
Christophe Galtier
Left Lille for Nice
Florian Kohfeldt
Left Werder Bremen
Thomas Schaaf
Joined Werder Bremen
Heiko Herrlich
Left Augsburg
Markus Weinzierl
Joined Augsburg

Hannes Wolf
Left Bayer Leverkusen
Gerardo Seoane
Left Young Boys for Bayer Leverkusen
Hansi Flick
Left Bayern Munich for Germany
Julian Nagelsmann
Left RB Leipzig for Bayern Munich
Jesse Marsch
Left Red Bull Salzburg for RB Leipzig
Marco Rose
Left Borussia Monchengladbach for Borussia Dortmund
Adi Hutter
Left Eintracht Frankfurt for Borussia Monchengladbach
Oliver Glasner
Left Wolfsburg for Eintracht Frankfurt
Friedhelm Funkel
Left Cologne
Steffen Baumgart
Left Paderborn for Cologne
Jose Luis Mendilibar
Left Eibar

Sergio
Left Real Valladolid
Javi Gracia
Left Valencia
Pepe Bordalas
Left Getafe for Valencia
Michel
Joined Getafe
Diego Martinez
Left Granada
Pacheta
Left Huesca
Zinedine Zidane
Left Real Madrid
Carlo Ancelotti
Left Everton for Real Madrid
Roy Hodgson
Left Crystal Palace
Nuno Espirito Santo
Left Wolverhampton Wanderers
Sam Allardyce
Left West Bromwich Albion
Giuseppe Iachini
Left Fiorentina
Gennaro Gattuso
Left Napoli for Fiorentina
Luciano Spalletti
Joined Napoli

Davide Nicola
Left Torino
Ivan Juric
Left Verona for Torino
Antonio Conte
Left Internazionale
Simone Inzaghi
Left Lazio for Internazionale
Andrea Pirlo
Left Juventus
Massimiliano Allegri
Joined Juventus
Serse Cosmi
Left Crotone
Roberto D'Aversa
Left Parma
Enzo Maresca
Left Manchester City (Under-23s) for Parma
Paulo Fonseca
Left Roma
Jose Mourinho
Joined Roma
Claudio Ranieri
Left Sampdoria
Roberto De Zerbi
Left Sassuolo for Shakhtar Donetsk

"We love him so much. He's a special person. He's so nice... we cannot replace him, we cannot...we have his legacy"

Pep Guardiola breaks down when paying a gushing tribute to the departing Sergio Aguero

Appointments, sackings and loans

EUROPE

Some of the more notable Premier League players to be released at the end of their contracts were **DAVID LUIZ** (Arsenal), **PABLO HERNANDEZ** (Leeds United), **CHRISTIAN FUCHS** (Leicester City), **DANNY ROSE** (Tottenham Hotspur), **PATRICK VAN AANHOLT** (Crystal Palace), **AHMED ELMOHAMADY** (Aston Villa) and **GEORGINIO WIJNALDUM** (Liverpool) – the latter heavily linked with Barcelona.

Across Europe, **JAVI MARTINEZ** and **JEROME BOATENG** were released by Bayern Munich, while **TOMAS VACLIK** and **FRANCO VAZQUEZ**'s spells at Sevilla came to an end.

WES MORGAN (Leicester City), **SAMI KHEDIRA** (Hertha Berlin) **ANTONIO VALENCIA**, and **LARS** and **SVEN BENDER** (Bayer Leverkusen) all announced their retirements.

Departing... Gigi Buffon

GIANLUIGI BUFFON left Juventus for the second time, with his new club yet to be confirmed.

SOUTH AMERICA

Boca Juniors released former West Ham United, Internazionale, Lazio and Watford striker **MAURO ZARATE**.

ASIA

Gamba Osaka parted company with head coach **TSUNEYASU MIYAMOTO**.

The A-League's record appearance-maker **ANDREW DURANTE** announced his retirement.

Record-breaker... Andrew Durante

OBITUARIES

Tragic...Yeovil skipper Lee Collins

Lee COLLINS
(1988-2021)
The Yeovil Town captain tragically passed away aged just 32.

Peter KROHN
(1932-2021)
Former Hamburg boss that guided the club to the 1977 Cup Winners' Cup.

Doug HOLDEN
(1930-2021)
Former Bolton Wanderers winger and the last surviving player from the 1953 Stanley Matthews FA Cup final.

Willy TA BI
(1999-2021)
The promising Atalanta and Ivory Coast midfielder tragically died of liver cancer.

Derek UFTON
(1928-2021)
The ex-Charlton Athletic and England player also played county cricket for Kent.

John SLUDDEN
(1964-2021)
A striker of note in the Scottish leagues for Ayr United, Kilmarnock and East Fife, Sludden also coached Celtic's academy.

Mauro BELLUGI
(1950-2021)
Won the Serie A title with Inter in 1971 and represented Italy at two World Cups.

Willy VAN DER KUIJLEN
(1946-2021)
Record Eredivisie scorer with 311 goals and scored five times on his PSV debut aged 17. Won 22 Netherlands caps but was overshadowed by Johan Cruyff. Has a statue outside PSV's Philips stadium.

Mark Gleeson

Christophe REVAULT
(1972-2021)
The goalkeeper played for PSG, Rennes and Toulouse but his greatest affiliation was with Le Havre, having started and ended his career at the Normandy club.

Alan MCLOUGHLIN
(1967-2021)
Former Republic of Ireland midfielder whose equaliser against Northern Ireland in a World Cup qualifier helped secure his country's place at USA '94.

Tarcisio BURGNICH
(1939-2021)
As well as winning 66 Italy caps, going to three World Cups and winning Euro '68, Burgnich was a cornerstone of Helenio Herrera's *Catenaccio* system that helped Inter win back-to-back European Cups.

Francesc ARNAU
(1975-2021)
After starting his career at Barca, the Spanish goalkeeper went on to spend a decade with Malaga. Latterly worked as Real Oviedo's director of football.

Sami Hasan Al NASH
(1957-2021)
A legend of Yemeni football who had taken charge of the national team for the fourth time, Al Nash passed away after contracting coronavirus during an international training camp.

Chris CHILTON
(1943-2021)
Hull City's all-time record scorer, having hit 222 goals between 1960 and 1971.

Sandor PUHL
(1955-2021)
The Hungarian refereed the 1994 World Cup and 1997 Champions League finals.

Georgi DIMITROV
(1959-2021)
During the 1980s, the legendary CSKA Sofia and Bulgaria centre-back was one of the best defenders in Europe. In two spells at CSKA he won five league titles, while on the international stage he won 77 caps, including 56 as captain, and led the side that reached the last 16 at Mexico '86 – Bulgaria's second-best performance at a World Cup finals.

Rumen Paytashev

"It was not easy to tell him [Sergio Ramos] something which was not positive. We don't want to take any more ...we know that only around 18 or 19 will actually play"

Spain coach Luis Enrique on omitting Sergio Ramos and only selecting a 24-man squad instead of the permitted 26 players

EURO 2020 SQUAD WATCH

Benzema back for *Les Bleus*

The in-form Real Madrid striker returns to the French squad after a six-year absence from international football

• FRANCE
The headline from Didier Deschamps' Euro 2020 squad announcement was the return to the fold of exiled forward **Karim Benzema**. However, **Tanguy Ndombele**, **Ferland Mendy** and **Anthony Martial** were all omitted – the latter due to a knee injury.

• SPAIN
Luis Enrique sprung some big shocks in his 24-man party. National team captain **Sergio Ramos** was axed, along with **Jesus Navas** and **Sergio Canales**. Right-back **Cesar Azpilicueta** was recalled, **Aymeric Laporte** won his first Spanish call-up following a switch of international allegiance, while forwards **Adama Traore** and **Pablo Sarabia** made the cut with **Ansu Fati** ruled out through injury.

• NETHERLANDS
As expected **Virgil van Dijk** failed to recover in time to make *Oranje*'s squad, meaning a first call-up for 19-year-old centre-back **Jurrien Timber**. In attack, **Cody Gakpo** and **Quincy Promes** were preferred to **Steven Bergwijn**, while No.1 **Jasper Cillessen** withdrew after testing positive for COVID-19.

• PORTUGAL
With **Pedro Neto** injured, Primeira Liga top scorer **Pedro "Pote" Goncalves** was given a first call-up. **Nelson Semedo** was picked as **Joao Cancelo**'s understudy at right-back ahead of **Ricardo Pereira** and **Cedric Soares**.

• SWEDEN
Zlatan Ibrahimovic's return to international football was short-lived after a knee injury ruled him out of Euro 2020. **Jordan Larsson**, son of Swedish legend Henrik, was called up instead.

• ENGLAND
The players cut from the provisional 33-man squad were **Aaron Ramsdale**, **Ben White**, **Ben Godfrey**, **James Ward-Prowse**, **Jesse Lingard**, **Mason Greenwood** and **Ollie Watkins**, while knee surgery ruled out **Nick Pope**.

• GERMANY
Back-up goalkeeper **Marc-Andre ter Stegen** (knee injury) missed out on Joachim Low's final squad as Germany coach, while Low finally bowed to public pressure by recalling **Thomas Muller** and **Mats Hummels** after previously discarding them in 2019. Further surprise call-ups included Freiburg left-back **Christian Gunter** and Monaco striker **Kevin Volland**.

• SCOTLAND
A flurry of injuries to **Ryan Jack**, **Kenny McLean**, **Oli McBurnie** and **Oliver Burke** led to first senior call-ups for uncapped Under-21 trio **Billy Gilmour**, **Nathan Patterson** and **David Turnbull**, although Farense's in-form attacking midfielder **Ryan Gauld** failed to make the cut.

Late withdrawal... Jasper Cillessen's positive test saw Marco Bizot called up in his place

• BELGIUM
With squads expanded to 26, Roberto Martinez gambled on the fitness of **Axel Witsel**, who had originally been ruled out with an Achilles injury. Third-choice keeper **Koen Casteels**' knee surgery meant a call-up for **Matz Sels**.

• CROATIA
There were no major surprises in Zlatko Dalic's squad, with uncapped defender **Josko Gvardiol** expectedly called up.

• CZECH REPUBLIC
After **Ondrej Kudela**'s ten-match ban was upheld, **Michal Sadilek** was the wildcard pick in the Czechs' squad. The other notable news was the omission of midfielder **Lukas Provod** (knee injury) and former captain **Borek Dockal**.

• AUSTRIA
The headline absentees from Franco Foda's final selection was experienced goalkeeper **Heinz Lindner** and striker

"We have four players who play at right-back for their clubs…they are in our best 26 footballers and that's why they're in the squad. If I could have picked a fifth or sixth right-back I would have done"

England manager Gareth Southgate on selecting Trent Alexander-Arnold, Reece James, Kieran Trippier and Kyle Walker

"I had a long reflection to come to this decision…I needed it, he needed it"

Didier Deschamps on recalling Karim Benzema

Adrian Grbic. Midfielder **Konrad Laimer** was called up despite missing almost the whole of 2020-21 with a knee injury.

• DENMARK
The Danes' party was as expected with the only talking points being **Nicolai Boilesen** getting picked ahead of **Henrik Dalsgaard** at full-back and **Andreas Cornelius** pipping **Marcus Ingvartsen** to a place in the forward line.

• NORTH MACEDONIA
Igor Angelovski handed a first senior call-up to striker **Milan Ristovski** after first-choice forward **Ilija Nestorovski** was ruled out of the tournament with a knee injury. Another surprise inclusion was midfielder **Darko Churlinov**, last called up four years ago when aged 16.

• POLAND
Paulo Sousa was dealt two big blows before announcing his final squad, with left wing-back **Arkadiusz Reca** (meniscus injury) and striker **Krzysztof Piatek** (broken ankle) both ruled out.

Recall…Deschamps and Benzema finally bury the hatchet

• HUNGARY
The Magyars were dealt a hammer blow with **Dominik Szoboszlai** joining injured midfielder **Zsolt Kalmar** on the sidelines. Uncapped forwards **Szabolcs Schon** and **Janos Hahn** were surprise inclusions.

Out…Hungary's star man Dominik Szoboszlai failed to recover in time

• ITALY
Following Italy's exit from the Euro U21s, striker **Giacomo Raspadori** was handed a shock promotion by Roberto Mancini. **Gianluca Mancini**, **Matteo Pessina** and **Matteo Politano** were trimmed.

• WALES
Uncapped attacking midfielder **Rubin Colwill** was the shock name in Wales' squad. Defender **Tom Lockyer** was also called up with **James Lawrence** injured.

• RUSSIA
Injury-hit attacker and World Cup 2018 hero **Denis Cheryshev** made the cut for Russia's final squad, but striker **Fyodor Smolov** was not recalled.

• TURKEY
Injury ruled out Turkey's top scorer in qualifying **Cenk Tosun**, but youngsters **Halil Dervisoglu** (forward) and **Ridvan Yilmaz** (left-back) were both named.

• SWITZERLAND
Young defenders **Eray Comert**, **Becir Omeragic** and **Jordan Lotomba** made the cut in Vladimir Petkovic's squad.

• UKRAINE
Winger **Yevhen Konoplyanka**, striker **Junior Moraes** and midfielder **Viktor Kovalenko** all missed out on a place in Ukraine's final party due to injury.

• FINLAND
Sibling defenders **Sauli** and **Leo Vaisanen** made Finland's selection.

• SLOVAKIA
The notable absentee from Stefan Tarkovic's final squad was winger **Albert Rusnak**, while striker **David Strelec** was cut from the original provisional party.

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✓ Every team ANALYSED
AUGUST ISSUE ON SALE JULY 16

Austria Vienna

Historic club narrowly escape demotion to amateur ranks

Austria Vienna's 110-year run in the top flight of the country's football league came perilously close to an end, and it had nothing to do with what was happening on the pitch.

Beset by financial problems, the Violets were initially denied a licence for next season, which would have condemned them to amateur football, and were only saved when the decision was overturned on appeal by Austrian football's so-called "protest committee".

This followed a huge fund-raising campaign in which Austria international David Alaba, who began his career at the club, was reportedly among the contributors. In between, fans organised a mock funeral procession that ended with them depositing a coffin at the doors of the club's Generali Arena, as part of a protest against the club's owners. "The time of the gravediggers is over," read one banner at the protests. "Not a threat but a promise: If you destroy our Austria, we will destroy you!" said another.

Things have been getting steadily worse for the 24-time Austrian champions and 27-time cup winners. For the last two seasons, they have not even managed to make the title play-offs (the Austrian Bundesliga is split into two groups for the final part of the season) and have instead been thrown into the relegation group.

Their story is similar to many other traditional clubs around Europe from outside the big five leagues.

There was a time when Austria Vienna were a force in Europe, reaching the European Cup Winners' Cup final in 1978 and European Cup semi-final the following season, where they lost 1-0 on aggregate to Malmo – the sort of pairing which would nowadays be unthinkable in the final four of Europe's top club competition.

But the reshaping of European football has seen clubs from smaller leagues unable to compete with the financial muscle of those from the "Big Five". Austria Vienna's last appearance in the Champions League group stage was in 2013-14 and, predictably, they finished bottom of their group.

Protest...fans staged a mock funeral outside the stadium

The club expect to operate on a budget of €24 million for the 2021-22 season, a modest amount which includes the youth and women's teams, but is still the second-highest in the Austrian Bundesliga.

In the last three seasons, they have made only one signing that involved the payment of a fee – €260,000 for Benedikt Pichler from Austria Klagenfurt in 2019.

Founded as Wiener Amateur SV in 1910 and renamed Austria Vienna in 1926, their problems were compounded following the arrival of Red Bull at Salzburg in 2005.

Like neighbours Rapid Vienna, Austria were simply unable to compete with both Red Bull's financial resources and slick management.

RB Salzburg, backed by a world-class scouting setup, have become remarkably successful in the art of acquiring young talent, developing the players and selling them on to bigger clubs for a huge profit, and the traditional clubs have been unable to keep up.

In contrast, Austria Vienna have only sold one player for a fee since the start of 2020, earning €365,000 for midfielder Tarkan Serbest.

Of Austria Vienna's 24 titles, only three have come since the turn of the century and the last was in 2013. Since then, they have employed eight different coaches, with none able to replicate success, including former Borussia Dortmund boss Peter Stoger, manager for the 2020-21 campaign.

Last season, the club – which is valued at €25m – reported a loss of €19m and liabilities of €78m.

There was hope in March when the club signed a partnership with luxury lifestyle management group Insignia, a move that chief executive Markus Kraetschmer described as a milestone in its history. "We believe in Austria's potential to become one of the best and most important brands in football," said Insignia vice-president Luka Sur.

But, only one month later, the application for a licence for next season was rejected by the Austrian Bundesliga, reportedly due to a lack of bank guarantees.

Austrian media reports said the club had just over one week to raise €7m, something they achieved with the help of former players Alaba – who reportedly chipped in with €500,000 – and Aleksandar Dragovic, club president Frank Hensel and vice-president Raimund Harreither.

Kraetschmer would not confirm details but implied that there had been some generous contributions. "If someone wants to talk about it, he is at liberty to do so. We as a club are not allowed to say anything about it," he said. "Many people took the initiative. We have experienced solidarity and cohesion. Basically, everyone inside and outside the club agreed: Austria Vienna must stay in the Bundesliga."

Brian Homewood

Things have been getting steadily worse for the 24-time Austrian champions and 27-time cup winners

Saviour...Alaba was reportedly among the club's donors

Dinamo Bucharest

A turbulent season for Romania's second-most successful club

In 2004 Dinamo Bucharest played Manchester United in a Champions League qualifier. In 2021 they signed a player released by Halifax Town.

With all due respect to Gevaro Nepomuceno – who scored one National League goal before moving to Romania in January – it is a stark illustration of the drop off that Dinamo have experienced.

With 18 league titles, they are Romania's second-most successful club. Since being formed in 1948, they have only ever played top-flight football. Now though, that record is under threat, while their last title came in 2007.

The club has struggled against years of corruption and financial issues. Just like the two previous campaigns, the 2020-21 season was spent fighting relegation. Five wins in a row, followed by a 0-0 draw with Chindia on the final day, was enough to save them for another year. But Dinamo have been fighting for their lives off the pitch, too.

Last August, Benel International, a Spanish consortium fronted by former Spanish FA vice-president Juan Jose Melero, bought a 72 per cent stake in Dinamo from Ionut Negoita.

New chairman Pablo Cortacero started off saying the right things, outlining Benel's plan to restore Dinamo to the Champions League and top of Liga I. Actions soon followed these words: former Romania boss Cosmin Contra returned for a second spell at Stefan cel Mare. Spanish Under-21 international Aleix Garcia arrived from Manchester City. More senior internationals, such as Abdoulaye Ba, Adam Nemec and Magaye Gueye also signed.

However, by recruiting 16 players, Cortacero more than doubled Dinamo's debts to €5.5 million. Players have gone several months without wages. Contra walked after just 11 games, scathingly commenting to the press: "Maybe [Cortacero] should look in the mirror to see what loyalty means."

The trouble is, no one is quite sure what the "faceless ghost" would see. He has not been seen in Romania for months. One of the top web results lists Cortacero's only experience as a director of a now defunct business in Gloucestershire. His Facebook profile is full of scores of unanswered comments from Dinamo supporters asking when his money will arrive.

Struggling...Dinamo midfielder Paul Anton

In December Cortacero claimed his €5m investment was being held up in the UK. Understandably alarmed, Dinamo's Peluza Catalin Hildan (PCH) fan group – who own 20 per cent of club shares – called on the Spanish ambassador to Romania, Manuel Larrotcha Parada, to "report the scam of a money-laundering business."

Last November, Cortacero rejected PCH's offer of financial support in a suspicious letter. It contained several inconsistencies, including the wrong year and spelling of Dinamo as "Dynamo". PCH assert this as "clear evidence we are dealing with an organised criminal group."

> "[There is] clear evidence we are dealing with an organised criminal group"
>
> Dinamo Bucharest fan group PCH

All but one of the players signed from Spain have now left. Garcia has gone to Eibar, while Ba left after just two months. Meanwhile, Gueye was released in March after testing positive for cocaine.

Journeyman...former Oldham Athletic and Halifax Town winger Gevaro Nepomuceno

Cortacero has not been in control of the club since late November 2020, having been removed as chairman at a general meeting of shareholders (AGA). In March a court case – for which no representative of Benel showed up – ruled Cortacero's dismissal as lawful.

Since then, PCH and their *socios* programme Doar Dinamo Bucuresti (DDB) have been funding the club. Money has been raised though annual memberships, alongside sales of special T-shirts, scarves and around 20,000 virtual tickets for each game.

Their crowning moment came in March, when a "friendly of salvation" against Dynamo Kiev, managed by former Dinamo player and coach Mircea Lucescu, helped raise enough to meet a €830,000 target for a new domestic licence. Local authorities have also given the go-ahead for a new stadium, with building set to commence later this year.

There are, however, still issues. Cortacero is still Dinamo's majority owner, while sporting director Rufo Collado was recently spotted back in Bucharest. That is no coincidence, with the end of the Liga I season meaning Benel are due their share of TV rights.

Former international midfielder Danut Lupu, who enjoyed three spells at Dinamo, recently said bluntly: "It will be worse next year. As long as the Spaniards don't give up, I don't think this team has a chance of survival."

"In this moment it's worse than Negoita," says Ionut Zainea, senior editor at Radio Dinamo 1948. "I am worried, but also confident that DDB will be able to save the situation and bring the club to light!"

So long as DDB continue to win the upcoming court cases against Benel, it is hoped a solution will be found. The issue however is if Cortacero and his compatriots succeed with their appeals.

Collado was previously ridiculed for not knowing when Dinamo last won Liga I, instead replying: "My role is to talk about the present and the future, not the past."

If DDB are defeated, the past will be the only thing Dinamo have left.

James Kelly

Sergio Aguero

New chapter in career of Manchester City's record goalscorer

At the end of April, the Premier League launched its official Hall of Fame. The first inductees were record goalscorer Alan Shearer and four-time Golden Boot winner Thierry Henry, with a further 23 players shortlisted to be included next, inevitably triggering various debates and discussions about who deserved to be there.

One month earlier, Sergio Aguero announced that he would depart Manchester City at the end of the season. While the 33-year-old will not be eligible for the Hall of Fame until he retires, he can surely expect a call-up when he does finally hang up his boots. He has scored more goals in the competition than Henry, has a better strike rate than Shearer, and won more league titles than both of the legends put together. He is the highest-scoring foreign player in the league's history, while each of the three players ahead of him in the all-time scoring charts played over 100 more games than the Argentina striker.

And it's not just the numbers: Aguero delivered arguably the most iconic moment in Premier League history with his title-winning strike against QPR in 2012. How much more Hall of Fame can you get?

His time in England has often seen him labelled as a poacher or penalty-box specialist, a tag that he particularly had to challenge when Pep Guardiola arrived in 2016. Rumours persisted that the player would be culled from the new manager's plans, but he worked hard to make sure that he could continue to be effective in his team. Three of his four most prolific seasons have come under the Catalan's guidance.

In 2020-21, injuries greatly restricted his appearances, as did Guardiola's decision to switch to a striker-less formation in several big games. With his contract ending, 2021 was absolutely the right time for his departure. By scoring twice in the 5-0 thrashing of Everton in front of 10,000 returning fans, he was given the perfect send-off.

Send-off... Manchester City players throw Aguero into the air

Rumours had abounded for months about his next destination. Internazionale initially appeared to lead the chase, while his first club Independiente still harbour hopes of one day bringing their former prodigy back to Avellaneda.

At one point, it was suggested that the striker's ambition to break the Premier League goalscoring record could tempt him into joining Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur, or perhaps even his fellow Argentine Marcelo Bielsa at Leeds United.

Ultimately though, the Argentina reunion that always looked the most likely was the one with his international team-mate and room-mate, Lionel Messi. Shortly after playing his final Premier League game, Aguero announced that he had signed a two-year deal at Barcelona.

In some ways, it is surprising that Aguero hasn't come closer to joining one of the two Spanish giants before. Since he left Atletico Madrid in 2011, any gossip linking him with Barcelona or Real Madrid has been largely speculative, testament to how settled he has been in Manchester. Indeed, critics of Barcelona's recent transfer policy might point out that it is rather typical of the club to sign a player that they should have moved for some years ago.

> Aguero delivered arguably the most iconic moment in Premier League history...against QPR in 2012

Iconic...Aguero's famous last-gasp goal against QPR in 2012

More than anything, the move seems to be a reaction to the Luis Suarez fiasco of last summer, when the Uruguayan was sold to La Liga rivals Atletico Madrid for a cut-price deal, only for *El Pistolero* to go on and fire his new side to the title. Not only did the sale cost Barca the league it also alienated Messi, with Suarez his closest confidante in the squad.

Consequently, Barca have turned

to another prolific South American striker in his 30s, who is also a close friend and ally of Messi's.

Will signing Aguero be enough to appease Messi? Certainly the rumours of his departure have quietened since last summer's saga, although he is still – at the time of writing – yet to sign a new deal. On the pitch, it is hard to see the two Argentine forwards providing the energy and pressing ability to return Barca to the top of European football, although early reports suggest that Aguero will be a squad player, essentially replacing Denmark forward Martin Braithwaite in the pecking order.

Where the signing leaves Barca's other expensive misfits – Antoine Griezmann, Philippe Coutinho and Ousmane Dembele – remains to be seen. The task of accommodating them alongside Messi and Aguero, as well as another potential arrival Memphis Depay, plus rising young stars Ansu Fati, Francisco Trincao and Pedri will be a headache for any head coach, be it Ronald Koeman or anyone else.

Nevertheless, in a summer where spending is expected to be reduced, signing a player of Aguero's pedigree without paying a transfer fee could prove to be shrewd business.

Jamie Evans

PREMIER LEAGUE TOP SCORERS

	Goals	Games	S/rate
1. Alan Shearer	260	441	0.59
2. Wayne Rooney	208	491	0.42
3. Andy Cole	187	414	0.45
4. Sergio Aguero	**184**	**275**	**0.67**
5. Frank Lampard	177	609	0.29
6. Thierry Henry	175	258	0.68
7. Harry Kane	166	245	0.68
8. Robbie Fowler	163	379	0.43
9. Jermain Defoe	162	496	0.33
10. Michael Owen	150	326	0.46

Argentina mates...Aguero and Messi

Paik Seung-ho

Former Barcelona prodigy returns to his home country

When Paik Seung-ho was turning heads as a Barcelona youth player, he must have dreamt of a triumphant homecoming to South Korea one day. It is probably safe to say, however, that it hasn't quite turned out as he would have liked. The 24-year-old midfielder may have joined Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors, the K League champions and early season pace-setters, but the entire episode has been messy.

A decade ago, Paik was one of three South Korean talents on the books of Barcelona, along with Lee Seung-woo and Jang Gyeol-hee. They were an immense pride back in their homeland – especially Lee, who broke scoring records to become known as "The Korean Messi" – but the all-action Paik was the one who coaches felt could make it at the top level.

It didn't work out. Paik moved to nearby Girona and ended up signing for Darmstadt in Germany's second tier. Earlier this year however, Jeonbuk made moves to bring the Seoul-born star, who made his international debut in 2019, home to play in the K League for the first time.

Darmstadt...Paik played his last game in Europe in February

Only it wasn't that simple, as rivals Suwon Samsung Bluewings stepped in to remind everyone of their claim on the player. In 2010, Paik left Maetan High School, a feeder school for the Bluewings, to join Barcelona's youth team. Suwon agreed to support the player financially in Spain, on the expectation that his stay would not be too long and that he would join the team when he returned home.

Paik ended up spending a decade in Europe but when it emerged that Jeonbuk were interested earlier this year, the Bluewings stepped forward to insist that the initial agreement was still valid. Jeonbuk stepped back but Paik and Suwon were unable to reach an agreement. The player then was still available and so, in March, Jeonbuk signed him.

Now Suwon want their initial outlay of around £200,000 back, plus another £700,000 for legal damages and costs. It is unclear as to what is going to happen. Jeonbuk's position is that the dispute has nothing to do with them. Paik is unlikely to have that money lying around, so with Suwon threatening legal action it could get ugly. The K League, though, are keen to put the row to bed and get the former Barca product playing regularly again.

That is the hope, although Suwon may not appreciate the sight of Paik achieving his full potential for their rivals. There was once a great deal of excitement about the midfielder's career, active at both ends of the pitch, but it has stalled.

His return home has started rather slowly, though it may take more time to get into a strong and in-form Jeonbuk team. Local media described his debut as "not bad", but requests for an interview with the player were denied due to the uncertain situation that still hangs like a cloud above him.

Hopefully, things will improve on and off the pitch and Paik can show some of the talent that once caught the attention of Barcelona.

John Duerden

Girondins de Bordeaux

Six-time French champions in disarray

The year is 2009. Bordeaux are managed by one of France's greatest ever players, Laurent Blanc, while upcoming superstars Yoann Gourcuff and Marouane Chamakh are tearing through Ligue 1 with the club's first French league title in ten years in sight. With over 25,000 fans coming to the Stade Chaban-Delmas every week, the city is at one with the club, and a 42,000-seater new stadium is in the offing. Bordeaux look well on their way to dominating French football at a time when Paris Saint-Germain's billionaire Qatari owners are yet to arrive in the capital.

Fast-forward to today, and Bordeaux is a club in disarray. Just like Arsenal and Manchester United, fans have been protesting vociferously against American owners. Yet while the two Premier League giants are still in good enough shape to reach the latter stages of the Europa League, things are much bleaker for Bordeaux.

For 19 years, Bordeaux's owners were French terrestrial TV channel M6. But in November 2018, the club was sold to two American investment firms, General American Capital Partners (GACP) and King Street Capital, for a tidy €100 million. President of GACP and minority shareholder Joe da Grosa was put in place to run the club and appointed ex-PSG director Frederic Longuepee as his chairman. Fans were excited as major investment was promised in a project designed to get Bordeaux back into the Champions League.

The new owners' first transfer window in January 2019 saw promising youngsters Yacine Adli and Josh Maja brought in from PSG and Sunderland respectively. In March, respected Portuguese coach Paulo Sousa took charge, replacing Brazilian Ricardo Gomes, while Leicester City's former head of recruitment Eduardo Macia became sporting director. Despite all of this, though, the 2018-19 season proved to be a major disappointment as the Girondins finished in an unimpressive 14th place.

Barely a year after buying the club, in December 2019 the two ownership firms clashed. King Street were flabbergasted by GACP's day-to-day running of the club. A €35m debt had been racked up, due in large part to an €11m increase to the club's payroll. King Street managed to oust GACP, purchasing their 13 per cent share while also moving Frederic Longuepee to a more prominent role as CEO.

Yet the 2019-20 season proved another disappointment, with Bordeaux finishing 12th – a world away from their Champions League ambitions. By this time, Girondins' supporters group the Ultramarines had had enough of King Street, and Longuepee in particular. In June 2,000 fans gathered to demand the board's departure, with the *#NousLesGirondins* slogan gaining traction thanks to support from ex-players including Lilian Laslandes and Bixente Lizarazu. The latter said: "The club's situation is alarming, and its management is poor." To make matters worse, after the fans plastered the city with wanted posters for Longuepee – including a dig at his exorbitant €40,000 monthly salary – the president threatened to sue the supporters group.

That summer there was more upheaval as Macia and Paulo Sousa both left the club after disputes with Longuepee. Sousa was angry with

"Longuepee resign"... The "Ultramarines" take to the streets of Bordeaux to protest

Wanted...Longuepee tried to sue supporters for this poster

Defender Laurent Koscielny came in from Arsenal for £5m...but it soon emerged that Sousa neither wanted nor sanctioned the deal

Contentious signing... Laurent Koscielny

the board for a lack of new signings. Defender Laurent Koscielny came in from Arsenal for £5m, supposedly to show the club's ambition, but it soon emerged that Sousa neither wanted nor sanctioned the deal.

Alain Roche, a former Bordeaux player who'd also previously acted as the club's CEO, came in as sporting director, while Jean-Louis Gasset – Laurent Blanc's assistant during the 2008-09 title-winning season – was appointed manager. These were populist decisions designed to get disgruntled fans back onside, but once more things turned sour. Roche's impact appeared to be minimal, and fans believed he was nothing more than a puppet of the board. On the pitch, the 2020-21 season was a disaster, with Bordeaux dragged into a relegation dogfight, which doesn't bode well for Gasset's future.

And that's not all. In April, King Street announced they would no longer back the club financially, and *Les Girondins* have been placed in administration as the search for a new owner gets underway. Normally French league rules dictate that any club going into administration mid-season would automatically be relegated at the end of the campaign. Luckily for Bordeaux, the COVID-19 crisis has led to a rule change. They now have until the beginning of next season to find new backers.

Can the club find a suitable new owner in such a short time? Jean-Baptiste Aldige, the owner of rugby union club Biarritz Olympique, has been linked with a takeover, and the region's highly-valued wine industry has also been touted as a source of income. Rennes owner and billionaire Francois Pinault called on owners of Bordeaux's most prestigious vineyards to step in, while it has also been suggested that Chinese investment could be imminent, given that a quarter of the wine produced in the area is sold in China.

How much another foreign investor without a footballing pedigree would please the club's long-suffering supporters remains to be seen.

Gabriel Johnson

Cambuur

Order restored in Eredivisie as Cambuur achieve their long-awaited promotion

Justice has been served. That is the view of many Dutch fans following this season's outcome. With SC Cambuur going up and ADO Den Haag heading in the opposite direction, the feeling is that a score has been settled; what should have happened last season has finally taken place.

Many still remember Cambuur coach Henk de Jong's rage against the decision to deny promotion for the Frisian club, who had been top of the table since October: "This is the biggest disgrace in the history of Dutch sports," he said. With an 11-point lead over third place and just nine games remaining, plenty of people agreed with him.

In any other season, the promotion of Cambuur would simply have been a matter of time. Just as the relegations of ADO Den Haag – coached by Alan Pardew and stuffed with mediocre lower-league English players – and RKC Waalwijk were almost inevitable.

However, COVID-19 and the KNVB decided differently. The leagues were stopped and never restarted. The federation stated that as long as ADO and RKC had a mathematical chance of staying up, they couldn't be relegated.

What hurt most was that no club would gain promotion, as the KNVB did not want to expand to 20 clubs.

Cambuur, De Graafschap (who finished second) and other duped clubs (like Utrecht, who missed out on the cup final) went to court but lost their appeal. In the end they were fobbed off with financial compensation.

That was the moment for Cambuur, named after the working-class district Cambuursterhoek where they are based, to leave it all behind and concentrate on the new season, which they did splendidly. In 38 matches they won 29, lost four and scored 109 goals. Striker Robert Muhren bagged 38 of them.

Cambuur's promotion – their fourth in total and first since 2016 – will mean that a colourful club has returned to the Eredivisie. They hail from Leeuwarden, the capital of the province of Friesland, and an area with its own language, flag, anthem and culture. However, their fans are averse to the province's unique culture. They associate Friesland with arch-rivals Heerenveen, whose shirts are based on the Frisian flag and who play the anthem before every home match. They never mention Heerenveen by name, but call them DKV (*Dertig Kilometer Verderop*, translated: Thirty Kilometres Beyond).

Current national team assistant, Dwight Lodeweges, found out just how fierce the rivalry was in 2014. The coach was only halfway through his first season with Cambuur when he announced he would be joining their great rivals, and subsequently was literally chased away from the stadium by angry fans.

After Lodeweges' departure, his assistant De Jong took charge – his first of two spells managing the club. Now the 56-year-old, who departed after the last relegation and returned in 2019, must prove that Cambuur can survive at the top level. But that's for the future. At the moment, even he must admit, the world of Dutch football is in order again.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

Champions...Cambuur celebrate lifting the Eerste Divisie trophy

YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE
LIVERPOOL
FOOTBALL CLUB
EST·1892

MANCHESTER
UNITED

Arsenal

MANCHESTER
18
94
CITY

TOTTENHAM
HOTSPUR

JUVENTUS

What next for the DIRTY DOZEN?

The European Super League was shot down before it had barely got off the ground. So where does that leave the 12 clubs that attempted to start it? Sid Lowe, Paddy Agnew and Jim Holden report...

Arsenal

A first season without European football since 1996 highlights just how much money and influence has drained from Arsenal. They have the toughest job of the six English teams to retain (some might say recover) elite status without the artificial ring-fence of a Super League. The debacle has further infuriated noisy fans already hostile to the invisible owner Stan Kroenke, who they blame for a slump from invincible champions to mid-table sterility.

What now? There is serious interest in buying Arsenal from billionaire Spotify owner Daniel Ek, which could spark a revival. The Swede insists that he is a life-long fan of the Gunners, and has been backed by club legends Patrick Vieira, Dennis Bergkamp and Thierry Henry.

Yet Ek's opening bid - reportedly for £1.8bn - was rejected. The most likely outcome seems to be that Kroenke stays put and opts to change the manager in the hope of a miracle, although the early indications are that he will back Mikel Arteta for at least one more season.

Kroenke out...disgruntled Arsenal fans

Atletico Madrid

"The Super League was a great solution for football," Atletico Madrid president Enrique Cerezo told *Cope* radio station, and yet his club was the first of the Spanish teams to back down. In fact, the only one to do so, to date. They were also the only one of the three Spanish sides to confront any significant backlash from supporters, although it was still very limited compared to scenes in England.

Cerezo claimed that: "People will be in favour of it when they hear the details," and yet unlike Barcelona and Real Madrid he is not clinging on, nor risking anything by refusing to back down. Nor, just as importantly, was he offering any of those details – and that in part reflects Atletico's position. Rarely part of the early conversations or the plotting, not a committed conspirator, Atletico were one of those clubs that were "invited" to take part rather than an instigator. The invitation came late, and as a *fait accompli*, leaving them with little choice but to join – and, truth be told, grateful to do so.

The new La Liga champions' status as Spain's third club seems absolutely unquestioned now – which says something about the achievement of Diego Simeone since he took over a decade ago – but it wasn't always so. Some reports suggested they were given barely a few hours to join or watch a third slot be offered to Sevilla instead. Witnessing the reaction, unsure in the first place and aware that they would be very much a junior partner, but aware too that it would suit them, they regretted the decision quickly and soon folded. Now they just wait and let others play this out, which is more or less what they have done all along.

Barcelona

Florentino Perez, the president of Real Madrid, spoke about Barcelona's position before Barcelona did. A long way before, as it turned out. "Joan Laporta will speak tomorrow," he said during the now infamous interview on *El Chiringuito*, but Laporta didn't speak the next day, or the day after that, or the day after that.

As teams dropped out, and while Madrid continued to defend the project publicly, there was silence from Barca. Eventually, there was a statement saying they too were committed to the Super League, one of three clubs holding out. And yet the statement was the same as Madrid and Juventus, and there was very, very little from Laporta himself – the same Laporta who during the presidential campaign had suggested that he didn't like the idea.

All of which pointed to their desperate financial crisis, the fact that they were in a position where they had little choice.

It also left Barcelona in the awkward position of not just siding with rivals Real Madrid, but appearing to follow their lead, almost subservient to them. Laporta was always known as being bold, outspoken, and strong, but in this he looked anything but – it looked weak, leadership ceded to Perez, almost as if Madrid's president had taken them by the hand.

When the initial statement announcing the Super League had been published, Barcelona's was exactly the same as the rest except for the references to Perez's predominant role. And yet that feeling has only grown since, Barcelona stuck in a battle they can't really win.

Juventus

While there were three Italian members of the so-called "Dirty Dozen", it may well be Juventus who end up suffering most. This is obvious enough, given that Juve president Andrea Agnelli, along with Real Madrid's Florentino Perez, was a ringleader of this millionaires' rebellion. Lest Agnelli failed to understand what he might be risking, Italian Federation (FIGC) president Gabriele Gravina spelled it out loud and clear in early May. In plain language he told Juventus that either they drop this Super League idea, or they are out of Italian football.

This threatened hard-line is, in some senses, astonishing. The last club that the FIGC want to fight with is Juventus. Over the last decade of Italian decline, Juve have been the single shining light, on and off the field. Since being appointed president in 2010, Agnelli has overseen huge success that has included nine Serie A title wins, two losing Champions League finals and the building of a money-making new stadium in Turin. In that time, too, the club's annual revenues have gone from approximately €280m in 2013 to an all-time high of €621.5m in 2019.

"The failed coup"...a graffiti depicting Agnelli appeared near the Italian Football Federation's headquarters in Rome

However, the Super League fiasco represents an unexpected error by Agnelli. As a member of the Turin dynasty that has always controlled both the automoblile giant FIAT (these days called FCA or Fiat Chrysler Automobiles) and Juventus, Agnelli might seem to be untouchable. Yet this Super League fiasco comes at an unusually negative moment in his administration of Italy's most famous club. For a start, Juve's nine-year Serie A winning run has come to end. They had to be content with "only" winning the Coppa Italia and Italian Super Cup this season, and barely snuck into the Champions League places, only doing so on the final day of the campaign.

Then there is the Ronaldo question. The Portuguese forward was bought in from Real Madrid in a €350m operation, essentially to deliver the Champions League – a gamble that has not worked. Does that explain why Juve's debts currently stand at €385m?

In such a context, Agnelli argues that he badly needs the increased revenues of the Super League. Yet, the apparent failure of this last throw of the dice has clearly weakened his position, both at Juventus and inside Italian football.

Chelsea

Supporter protests on the streets outside Stamford Bridge on the night the Super League crumbled were a symbol of the episode. Chelsea were reluctant to join and swift to disengage; they have little need for the promised riches thanks to the vast personal wealth of Roman Abramovich. His ownership of Chelsea is as much a long-term PR project as about the sheer fun of sport. That's why they were the first of the English six to agree for supporters to be officially represented at board meetings as "advisors". Just window dressing? Time will tell, but sometimes real change is the unintended consequence of events. Certainly, Chelsea's image is recovering more quickly than the others, helped hugely by success on the field under new manager Thomas Tuchel.

Petr Cech...Chelsea's technical director was forced to confront supporters outside Stamford Bridge

Man. United

"I think the clamour for a Super League was an hysterical reaction, a tendency to undersell British football. Now I hope we know better." These were the words of Matt Busby in 1968, and they are just as true today.

The ignorance and folly of United's owners, the Glazers, has re-ignited demonstrations and discontent, the ugly mood symbolised by fans invading Old Trafford and forcing postponement of the Liverpool match. The angry eloquence of influential pundits like Gary Neville underscores the depth of feeling.

The Glazers hope to ride out the storm, but that won't be easy with the team knocked off its perch at the top. The volatility of the situation makes it impossible to know where this story is heading next.

Pitch invasion...United fans on the Old Trafford pitch

Man. City

Of all the six English clubs, the collapse of the Super League had the least impact on Manchester City. It was evident they were not the instigators or ringleaders of the project, and they were the first to formally withdraw. Money was never an issue, while manager Pep Guardiola was swift in strong condemnation.

The Abu Dhabi owners of City were hedging their bets by joining the 12, and they are too rich for regrets. Where now? Well, they continue to fund an all-time great manager creating a beautiful football team. They remain inscrutable.

If there is a lesson learned, it is that the Premier League is the powerhouse of European football, the original super division, a truth that explains the machinations of debt-ridden Real Madrid and Juventus.

Liverpool

The saga of the Super League was a disaster for Liverpool's owners Fenway Sports Group (FSG). They had won hearts and minds through years of hard work and the brilliance of Jurgen Klopp, and discarded the goodwill like a child carelessly throwing a sweet wrapper into the gutter.

Did they not understand the collective spirit and emotion that lies at the heart of a club with a particular history? The supporters felt trampled on; all the fine words of FSG had been a sham.

In contrast to fellow rebels the Glazers, those in charge at FSG appear more willing to recognise their grievous error, talking to fans about "meaningful" representation on the board. If real, that will be a vital first step on the road to re-building the relationship with fans - but it is nevertheless a long journey.

Internazionale

Immediately after Inter had wrapped up the league title for the first time since 2010, the players received a note from management that basically said: "Well done for winning the *Scudetto*; now we want you to take a two-month wage cut."

Last February, Inter's Chinese owners, electronics giant Suning, posted a €3.9bn loss for the year 2020, prompting initial speculation that they might want to sell the Italian giants.

That is not going to happen but, faced with a €244m debt, Inter have launched a 15 per cent austerity cutback package which will impact on next season. Just for a start, it led to Antonio Conte's departure and at least one of their top players is expected to be sold.

Milan

Milan are still very much in a rebuilding process that began when former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi sold the club in 2017, and they too have huge debts on the books: approximately €103m. Like arch-rivals Inter and Juventus, they would clearly welcome a Super League financial bonanza.

However, when the project began to unravel, they and Inter had no difficulty raising the white flag, leaving Juventus to fight on with Real Madrid and Barcelona. Obviously, the two Milanese clubs are very different from Juventus in that they are both foreign-owned – Inter by Suning and Milan by US hedge fund investment firm, Elliott Management Corporation – and therefore inevitably played a less visible and more discreet role in a Super League campaign led by Juventus. Then too, for Inter as title winners and Milan as Champions League qualifiers, their seasons ended on a much better note than that of fourth-placed Juventus.

Nonetheless, if the Super League project was to raise its head again in the not too distant future, all three Italian clubs would still be tangentially very favourable towards it - Europe-wide fan disapproval notwithstanding.

Tottenham

Tottenham haven't won a domestic league title since 1961, and their last trophy was in 2008. Are those credentials for Super League entry?

On the day the revolution unravelled, Spurs were more concerned with the sacking of manager Jose Mourinho. The club's motivation for joining was to ease the financial burden that came with construction of a magnificent new stadium. Supporter anger was directed at owners ENIC and visible chief executive Daniel Levy, but there is no prospect of them being toppled.

The absolute key for Spurs was the choice of a new manager at such a critical moment to revive the fortunes of the first team and the bank balance. Missing out on top target Julian Nagelsmann was evidence of how far Tottenham are from being super.

Real Madrid

For a moment, Real Madrid president Florentino Perez appeared to have been badly burnt by the Super League project. He, after all, was its president and most public face, the only person speaking – and speaking too much.

Not only that, but his appearance on *El Chiringuito* and then on *Cadena Ser* radio offered a very unflattering picture of him, a man seemingly out of touch, unconvincing, rambling, contradictory and defeated, the paranoid old man at the head of a project that looked poorly planned and executed.

Not just that, but the lasting message left by his appearance could be reduced to the enormity of the economic crisis his club faced. That was a portrait that surprised onlookers in Spain, as Perez is incredibly powerful and even those who dislike and fear him would regard him as a highly competent administrator.

Over the next few days, though, that power was brought to bear and he was rehabilitated, media and opinion swinging in behind him – in Spain at least. At least he had fronted the project while others hid, it was said. At least he led, and held his ground, while others deserted. And as Perez dug in, a new narrative emerged in which Madrid were cast almost as freedom fighters against UEFA, now portrayed as some dark, shadowy and vengeful cabal. Meanwhile, the clubs that left were repackaged as traitors, Perez hitting out at them too.

He knows that the project is dead, but clings to it, seeking legal action and financial retributions from his erstwhile partners. He knows he can't win this particular fight, but there will be more, and his personal reputation is once again intact domestically.

Ringleader...Real president Florentino Perez

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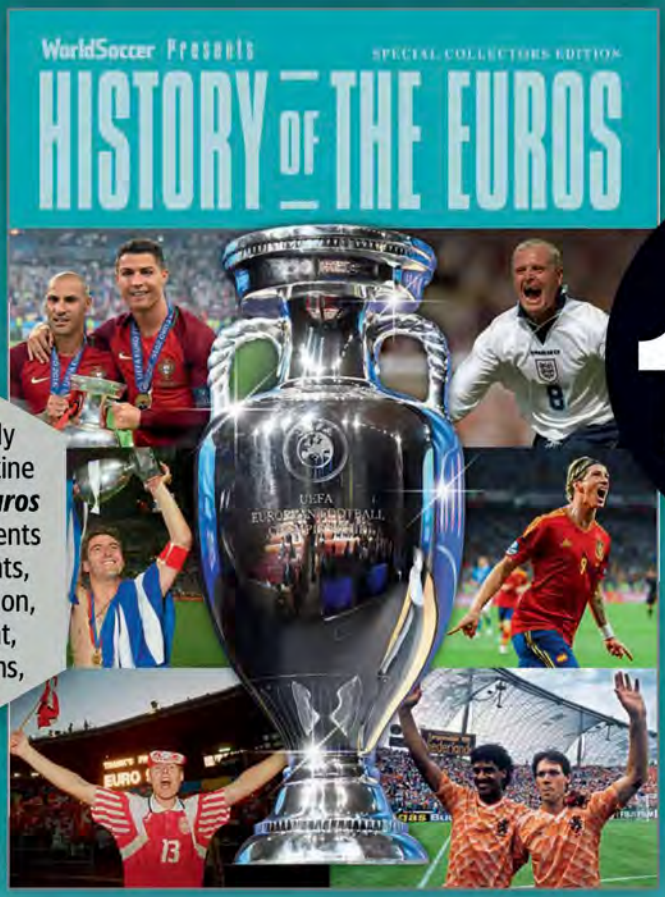

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2020-21

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CHELSEA WIN ALL-ENGLISH FINAL

Is a new era of Premier League dominance about to begin?

The third all-English final of the Champions League revealed the English elite as the de facto Super League. While the ravages of COVID-19 exposed the financial fragility of Spanish, Italian and German football, so the billionaire status of Chelsea and Manchester City enabled them to maintain fatter squads than any of their skinny continental rivals.

UEFA's flagship club competition is a notoriously fickle lover. In the modern era, only Real Madrid have extended the romance for more than one year. An overall message from Porto, however, was that the Premier League can likely deliver winners again next season.

This will not necessarily be Chelsea, deserved as their outplaying and out-thinking of Manchester City and Pep Guardiola was, in a duel whose energy resembled a sixth-round FA Cup tie. Both will be back next season, along with an injury-clear Liverpool and an erratic Manchester United.

The European kick-off had been delayed until last mid-August by the COVID-enforced late finish to 2019-20. An enduring sign of the times was the Faroes' KI being awarded a first-round qualifier after Slovan Bratislava were laid low by a spate of positive COVID-19 tests.

Winning goal...Kai Havertz leaps over Ederson en route to scoring the winner

Some 79 clubs had set out in hope of a welcome financial injection if nothing else, and 47 were already history by the group stage. The unplanned bonus of the fixtures concertina was a rushed mini-league whose annual ennui should be a red light for Super League proponents.

The yawning predictably of the outcome was snagged only by the failures of Internazionale and Manchester United.

Inter, ironically considering they finished up winning Serie A amid financial collapse, crashed out after finishing rock bottom of Group B. United's flimsiness was exposed by first their third-placed finish in Group H and then by coming up short in the Europa League final.

This was no vintage Champions League. Far from it. Spain's Atletico Madrid and Barcelona fell in the round of 16 and a frail Real Madrid surprised themselves by reaching the semi-final before rolling over. Holders Bayern Munich paid the quarter-final price for an inability to cover for injury to free-scoring Robert Lewandowski.

No wonder that the Premier League, with its financial and competitive security, came up with not only the champions but both finalists. Cash-rich pride was rewarded further by the contribution of Kai Havertz – Chelsea's record signing at £70m, signed as part of last year's £200m splurge – as the match-winner.

Porto, a late pandemic-driven substitute for Istanbul, saw Thomas Tuchel become the third successive German coach to win the trophy after Jurgen Klopp and Hansi Flick. Tuchel also had the last laugh on PSG for sacking him in mid-season.

Having lost the European final with PSG a year ago he was thrilled to meet Blues owner Roman Abramovich on the Porto pitch for the first time.

Chelsea deserved victory on a night that renewed the debate about Guardiola once more over-thinking his European

Winners... captain Cesar Azpilicueta lifts the Champions League trophy

strategy. He undermined his Premier League winners by recalling a rusty Raheem Sterling in attack and eschewing a midfield anchor. That meant fatally restraining and wasting the talent of Ilkay Gundogan who had been a top-scoring attacking force in the Premier League.

Sterling almost sneaked in behind the Chelsea defence in the early exchanges but Chelsea were more dangerous. Timo Werner squandered two half-chances and when City did threaten again, a superbly-timed tackle from Antonio Rudiger foiled goal-bound Phil Foden.

Chelsea lost injured Thiago Silva in the 39th minute but overcame the setback perfectly by taking the lead when Havertz converted Mason Mount's defence-splitting through pass. The lead was

Turning point...De Bruyne leaves concussed

Man of the match...Kante

preserved with an all-action second-half effort led by the tireless N'Golo Kante.

City scrambled forward with increasing urgency after injury had removed Kevin De Bruyne. Chelsea could have punished them further. Substitute Christian Pulisic might have marked with a goal a slice of history, as the first American to play in a Champions League final, but shot wide.

Briefly the eagerness of Gabriel Jesus brought new spark into City's attack but even late-arriving Sergio Aguero could not work his goal-area magic.

> An overall message from Porto, however, was that the Premier League can likely deliver winners again next season

For City the wait goes on to win the one prize their Abu Dhabi owners want above all else. The magic that worked twice for Guardiola with Barcelona a decade ago continues to fail him, just as it did in three blank European years with Bayern Munich and now five with City.

"Hopefully we will be here again in the future," he said afterwards. Certainly next season that should mean either City or someone else from the Premier League.

Keir Radnedge

2021 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL
May 29 – Estadio do Dragao, Porto

MANCHESTER CITY	0
CHELSEA (Havertz 42)	1

HT: 0-1 Ref: Antonio Mateu Lahoz

Manager: Guardiola Manager: Tuchel

WHAT THEY SAID

THOMAS TUCHEL
(Chelsea manager)
"I spoke to the owner for the first time on the pitch. It was the best moment for a first meeting. I can assure him that I will stay hungry, that I want the next title and I feel happy. My desire is to go for more victories, to grow as a coach and to push the group from the first day of next season to the limit. We have work to do. We have to close the [Premier League] gap. We had wanted to be a stone in City's shoe. We encouraged everybody to step up and step out, to be more brave and create dangerous counter-attacks. It was a tough, physical game. We had to help each other out."

CESAR AZPILICUETA
(Chelsea captain)
"[Kai Havertz] deserves this. His mentality is tough. This guy is going to be a superstar. He runs like crazy and he gave us the Champions League."

BEN CHILWELL
(Chelsea)
"We fought for our lives. The spirit of everyone was amazing. We're such a close-knit group. I came to Chelsea last year to win trophies and now this is the biggest of them all. N'Golo Kante is, 100 per cent, the best midfielder in the world. He's won everything there is to win. He's like two or three players in one. He tackles, he's good on the ball, he's an unbelievable person."

THIAGO SILVA
(Chelsea)
"This is the most important moment of my career. Without Frank Lampard I would not be here. I am very happy. I hope he will be, too."

PEP GUARDIOLA
(Manchester City manager)
"The players were exceptional and we will come back. In the second half we deserved to score. We were brave but we could not convert the chances because they were so strong. The [selection] decision I made was the best to try to win the game. Gundogan has played many years in this [defensive] position. To have speed, to find the small players, the quality, the brilliant players, inside, in the middle and between the lines. This was the decision. I congratulate Chelsea and we need to learn from this for the future. It is not easy. It was our first time in the final and the players gave everything. I have incredible respect for them."

VILLARREAL MAKE HISTORY

Spanish side overcome Manchester United after marathon penalty shootout

Opener...Gerard Moreno slides in to put his side ahead

In the end, after an increasingly preposterous penalty shootout, there was an air of inevitability about the denouement. As 21 penalties in a row were scored, the mind began to play tricks. What did a missed penalty look like? Was it even possible to miss them? Or was this some sort of purgatory, Villarreal and Manchester United whacking penalties into a net in Gdansk, forever?

And then it came down to the two goalkeepers. On the one hand Rulli, Villarreal's second choice, a man many had expected to be left out for Sergio Asenjo. It is an increasingly familiar conundrum of the cup keeper: it's all very well to give your reserve pitch-time in the early rounds, but at what stage do you bring in the number one? For Unai Emery, it was never. He showed faith in Rulli, and was thoroughly vindicated. Rulli had never taken a penalty before, but lashed in his kick: 11-10. Only David De Gea remaining for a perfect set, every player on the pitch converting.

Back in 2006, when Villarreal faced Arsenal in a Champions League semi-final, a missed penalty proved decisive. Juan Roman Riquelme, a rare look of anxiety on his always gloomy face, had never looked like beating Jens Lehmann. This time, it was the other way round: David De Gea, with the air of a doomed llama, side-footed his effort, Rulli saved, and Villarreal had the first major trophy in their 98-year history.

Which immediately forced the question: why was De Gea still on the pitch? Perhaps changing a goalkeeper before a shootout, even after Louis van Gaal's introduction of Tim Krul against Costa Rica at the 2014 World Cup, remains an outlandish move, but it was one that was being openly talked about. De Gea had not saved any of the previous 25 penalties he'd faced over the past six years, whereas Dean Henderson had saved eight of the 19

Winners...Villarreal players celebrate with the trophy

he'd faced in his career. Solskjaer, having not made a substitution until the tenth minute of extra-time, still had one left to make. It proved a decisive omission.

To judge him on that alone, perhaps, would be unreasonable, but he was similarly frozen by indecision in not replacing Fred before he was sent off against Paris Saint-Germain in December. And, on a more structural level, again his inability to construct a side capable of attacking fluently against teams who sit deep was exposed. On the break, United excel, which is how they were able to beat Manchester City, Paris Saint-Germain and RB Leipzig, and why their away record was so good in the Premier League this season. Against deeper-lying teams they are reliant on great individuals to do great things, which is how Crystal Palace, Sheffield United and Fulham were able to frustrate them.

United may have picked up eight more points in the league this season than last, but it's very hard to say that progress is to do with anything more than the acquisition of Edinson Cavani, whose penalty-box instincts brought the equaliser against Villarreal. A poacher stealing an equaliser as the ball ricocheted around the box after a corner inevitably raised memories of United's Champions League win over Bayern Munich, played 22 years to the day before this final.

But this time there was no second goal. Villarreal were comfortable and after surviving a scare when Marcus Rashford prodded wide probably looked the more likely to score in extra-time. This was a classic Emery performance, dogged and well-organised, and with a threat on the counter and from set-plays. Villarreal's goal, poked in by Gerard Moreno, his 30th of the season to take his tally for the club to a record-equalling 82, was the result of a well-planned free-kick routine.

Planning and organisation are everything to Villarreal, a club from a city of 50,000 people who were transformed when Fernando Roig bought them 24 years ago. He was not in Gdansk, denied access to the stadium by UEFA having tested positive for COVID two weeks before the final, in spite of the fact that he has received the vaccine and subsequently tested negative with two PCR tests.

Dejected...De Gea walks past the trophy

Equaliser...Edinson Cavani makes it 1-1

> David De Gea had not saved any of the previous 25 penalties he'd faced over the past six years

He was waiting for the players at the airport after the flight home though, ready, after four defeats in semi-finals, to celebrate a trophy at last.

Jonathan Wilson

Decisive...Geronimo Rulli saves David De Gea's penalty to seal the victory

2021 EUROPA LEAGUE FINAL
May 26 – Gdansk Stadium

VILLARREAL (Moreno 29) **1**

MANCHESTER UNITED (Cavani 55) **1**

Villarreal win 11-10 on penalties HT: 1-0 Ref: Clement Turpin

Villarreal: Rulli; Pedraza (A. Moreno 88), Torres, Albiol, Foyth (Gaspar 88); Trigueros (Moi Gomez 77), Parejo, Capoue (Dani 120+3), G. Moreno; Bacca (Coquelin 60), Yeremy (Alcacer 77)
Manager: Emery

Manchester United: De Gea; Wan-Bissaka (Mata 120+3), Lindelof, Bailly (Tuanzebe 116), Shaw; Greenwood (Fred 100), McTominay (Telles 120+3), Fernandes, Pogba (James 116); Cavani, Rashford
Manager: Solskjaer

WHAT THEY SAID

GERONIMO RULLI
(Villarreal goalkeeper)
"I had never taken a penalty before. I was annoyed because I'd got my hand to three or four of the penalties but not saved any of them. I could see my family in the stand behind the goal. I didn't really think; it would be worse to think. I just gave it everything I had. I was just thinking: 'Just go in, just go in,' and it did."

UNAI EMERY
(Villarreal manager)
"In the Europa League we have been absolutely impeccable since the first moment. Some days we were coming at 6am to the stadium to prepare a game for the Sunday. All of this makes the journey [worthwhile]. We were talking about enjoying these moments. Winning is another step, an important step. We do this profession for these moments. We've been able to give joy to many people."

OLE GUNNAR SOLSKJAER
(Manchester United manager)
"We didn't turn up, we didn't play as well as we can. We started all right; they got the goal with their only shot on target, and we're disappointed to concede again on a set-piece. We pushed, we pressed, we got the goal, but after that we couldn't control the game. They made it hard for us. We didn't create enough big chances.

That's the fine margins in football. Sometimes one kick can decide if a season is successful or not. There has been improvement, yes, we were second in the league and nobody really expected that after the start we had. The boys have been really good but just came up short tonight. Trophies matter and that's what matters at this club.

[On his late substitutions and not replacing De Gea]: You go through every scenario. It had crossed my mind in the build-up to the game but we were confident in David. Anything can happen in a penalty shootout and I went with the keeper who had played the whole game. We had players out there who are match-winners."

Manchester City back on top

Challengers fall by the wayside as Guardiola and Co. cruise to the Premier League title

The phrase: "Football without fans is nothing" has developed into a well-worn cliché over the past 12 months. Yet it is, nevertheless, true now as much as ever.

The joyful eruption of Leicester City supporters behind the Wembley goal as Youri Tielemans' long-range shot flew into the top corner to win the FA Cup final offered a stark reminder of what we have missed. Even the most exciting moments have lacked the buzz of atmosphere that the Premier League prides itself on.

Results have undoubtedly been affected too. With no fans, there were 153 away wins in 2020-21, comfortably eclipsing the previous record of 128. Home sides outscored away teams by just four goals; in 2018-19, the last "normal" season, the difference was 120.

In a campaign played almost entirely behind closed doors, the biggest story took place off the pitch: the short-lived launch of the European Super League. Having been denied their voices inside stadiums, supporters made sure that they made them heard outside of them. Demonstrations in Manchester, London and Liverpool were key in forcing the "Big Six" into U-turns, although it is not the end of the matter. The Super League proposals were the inevitable next step in a game where financial inequality is increasing; COVID has increased the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Rock-solid...Manchester City's centre-back partners Ruben Dias and John Stones

In April, clubs released their latest accounts and, unsurprisingly, champions Manchester City had the highest wage bill while bottom side Sheffield United had the lowest. Leicester spent vitrually the entire season in the top four, yet ultimately it was the league's four richest clubs that qualified for Champions League football. Meanwhile, the other two sides to go down, Fulham and West Bromwich Albion, had only just come back up from the Championship, with two of last season's relegated sides – Norwich City and Watford – coming straight back up. The Premier League is in danger of becoming more detached from the rest of the pyramid than ever.

Nevertheless, there have been shoots of hope for those of more modest budgets. West Ham United finished sixth thanks to David Moyes' shrewd acquisitions and smart team-building, while Leeds United bucked the trend of clubs yo-yoing between the first and second tiers by finishing ninth. Leicester ultimately missed out on the top four, but Brendan Rodgers' side are clearly in a stronger place than ESL wannabes Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur.

Usurpers...Phil Foden scores Manchester City's fourth goal at Anfield

Indeed, the Foxes led the league at the end of September, the first of several clubs to take a turn at the top of the pile. A month later, it was holders Liverpool in front, with Merseyside rivals Everton breathing down their necks. The next side to take up pole position however were Southampton, with the Saints spending an afternoon at the summit for the first time in 32 years.

By the end of November, Tottenham were in front, with Jose Mourinho

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

Luke Shaw (Manchester United) – Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United) – Jack Grealish (Aston Villa)

Edouard Mendy (Chelsea) – Harry Maguire (Manchester United) – Ruben Dias (Manchester City) – Ilkay Gundogan (Manchester City) – Harry Kane (Tottenham Hotspur)

Kyle Walker (Manchester City) – Kevin De Bruyne (Manchester City) – Mohamed Salah (Liverpool)

CUP FINAL

Leicester City won their first FA Cup in their fifth final thanks to Youri Tielemans' thumping goal and Kasper Schmeichel's heroics in goal. Wes Morgan was spared his blushes by VAR, when his 90th-minute own goal was ruled out. In March, **Manchester City** beat Tottenham 1-0 in the League Cup.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

The European spots was the final issue to settle. A strong finish helped **Liverpool** to finish third behind **Manchester United**, with **Chelsea** joining them in the top four. **Leicester** and **West Ham** go into the Europa League, with **Tottenham** in the Conference League.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS

Sheffield United, **West Brom** and **Fulham**'s relegations were all confirmed weeks before the season's end. In the Championship, **Norwich City** ran away with the title, promoted alongside runners-up **Watford**, while **Brentford** won the play-offs.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON

The tale of the title race could be simplified to two centre-backs: while Virgil van Dijk's injury hugely hindered Liverpool, **Ruben Dias**' arrival at Manchester City was vital to them becoming the league's most defensively solid team.

building a challenge based on sturdy defence and the attacking combination of Harry Kane and Son Heung-min. In their 2-0 win over Arsenal, the pair combined to score for the 11th time, in spite of the hosts controlling just 30 per cent of possession.

Ten days later they visited Anfield in a top-of-the-table clash, and looked set for another dogged result until Roberto Firmino's stoppage-time header. It proved to be a turning point in Spurs' season: they won just three of their next 11 matches, with their title challenge whimpering out shortly after the turn of the year. In March, Mourinho was fired in the week leading up to the Carabao Cup final.

Liverpool, meanwhile, followed up the victory with a 7-0 thumping of Crystal Palace, and celebrated Christmas as favourites to retain their crown.

Yet cracks soon began to appear. They scored just once in their next five games, and by the time their 68-game unbeaten home run in the league had been ended by Burnley, it was Manchester United's turn to lead.

The Red Devils were developing a remarkable habit of coming from behind to win games, while also impressing on the road, ending the campaign unbeaten away from home.

Yet their home form remained patchy, and at the end of January they suffered one of the shocks of the season: a 2-1 defeat to basement club Sheffield United at Old Trafford.

Now, it was Manchester City's turn to move to the top of the table – and there they stayed. And stayed.

City's third title in four seasons has had a sense of inevitability ever since a 4-1 win at Anfield in February. While Liverpool ought to have been City's biggest challenge, the Reds' defensive injury crisis – forcing them to field midfielders Fabinho and Jordan Henderson at centre-back – had taken its toll. The ease with which City swept aside the reigning champions confirmed their status as the country's best team.

All of a sudden, the title race had gone from being potentially one of the most open and exciting for years, to all but wrapped up by February.

Of all Guardiola's nine career league titles, this one was perhaps the most un-Pep. Compared with his other league-winning seasons, this one had, on average: the fewest points accrued, the fewest goals scored and the joint-fewest victories; the most defeats and second-most goals conceded, and – comfortably – the worst goal difference. City still keep the ball better than anyone else in the league, yet their average possession was the lowest it's been for four years.

> Of all Guardiola's nine career league titles, this one was perhaps the most un-Pep

Still, they kept the most clean sheets, and on those defensive foundations City sustained the 19-game unbeaten run in winter that got them over the line.

Ultimately, in the most challenging and unprecedented of circumstances, Guardiola and City found a way to win, and this ability to adapt made them worthy champions.

FA Cup final...Leicester lift the trophy

COACH OF THE SEASON
When **Thomas Tuchel** replaced sacked Frank Lampard as Chelsea manager at the end of January, with the club tenth in the Premier League, it seemed inconceivable that they would end the season as European champions. His impact has been nothing short of spectacular.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Marcelo Bielsa and Leeds were a breath of fresh air, producing some entertaining clashes. The fact they did so with just 23 players - fewer than anybody else in the league - many of whom played in the Championship, is testament to the Argentine's coaching.

Great appointment... Thomas Tuchel

Atletico Madrid win first title since 2014

A dramatic final day epitomised what was one of the most exciting title races in La Liga history

When Atletico Madrid missed out on the 1974 European Cup to Bayern Munich due to a 120th-minute equaliser from 40 yards out, *Los Colchoneros* earned a new nickname: *El Pupas* (The Cursed Team).

Coined by then-president Vicente Calderon, it's a term that's stuck with the club throughout modern history and often rears its head when things start to wobble. But some supporters think they've finally managed to shake it off. After all, how many cursed clubs beat Real Madrid and Barcelona to the league title? That's not to say that Atletico's 2020-21 title-winning season was totally smooth sailing: at times, it felt like the curse might come back to strike again.

Trophy-less...Real Madrid missed out on silverware in 2020-21

They started the season in incredible form, winning their first game 6-1 at home to Granada, with their new shock signing from Barcelona, Luis Suarez, coming off the bench to score a brace.

Undefeated after ten games and having not gone behind in any of those matches, Diego Simeone's switch in formation at the start of the season from a rigid 4-4-2 to a possession-based 3-5-2 was working wonders, with their upcoming clash with city arch-rivals Real Madrid the perfect chance to prove it.

However, a surprisingly timid display saw them beaten 2-0 at *Los Blancos'* temporary home, the Alfredo Di Stefano stadium. Not the damning defeat it was initially made out to be, Atleti quickly recovered to go on an eight-game winning streak, amassing an incredible 50 points by the halfway point of the season. The last time they'd managed that was in 2013-14, when they last got their hands on the La Liga trophy.

After 19 matches, they were ten points clear with a game in hand over both Barcelona and Real Madrid, and things were looking suitably rosy for *El Rojiblanco*. But then it struck; not *El Pupas*, but coronavirus.

Joao Felix, Moussa Dembele, Thomas Lemar and Hector Herrera all tested positive ahead of their game with Celta Vigo, while the in-form Kieran Trippier was still sidelined due to his ten-week betting ban. A last-minute equaliser by Celta Vigo's Facundo Ferreyra at the Wanda Metropolitano began a rut of just four wins in 11 La Liga games, including a 1-1 draw with Real.

Bundle... Luis Suarez is ambushed by his team-mates

Atleti's ten-point lead evaporated. After 30 games they remained top on 67 points, but with Real Madrid on 66,

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

Javi Galan (Huesca)
Gerard Moreno (Villarreal)
Jan Oblak (Atletico Madrid)
Jules Kounde (Sevilla)
Marcos Llorente (Atletico Madrid)
Luis Suarez (Atletico Madrid)
Stefan Savic (Atletico Madrid)
Toni Kroos (Real Madrid)
Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)
Kieran Trippier (Atletico Madrid)
Lionel Messi (Barcelona)

CUP FINAL

Two weeks after losing 1-0 to Real Sociedad in the postponed 2020 Copa del Rey final, Athletic Bilbao would once again taste defeat in Seville. **Barcelona** beat them 4-0 thanks to a Messi masterclass, in what was a record ninth meeting between the two teams in Copa del Rey finals history.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

The four title challengers took the four Champions League spots, while seventh-placed **Villarreal** made it five by winning the Europa League final, avoiding the Europa Conference League. **Real Sociedad** and **Real Betis** qualified for the Europa League.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS

Eibar's fairy tale took a dark turn as they finished bottom, just below the Ronaldo Nazario-owned **Real Valladolid** and **Huesca**. **Espanyol** bounced straight back up from Segunda alongside second-placed **Mallorca**, with the play-off winners still to be decided.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON

If Atletico Madrid's collective efforts had a standout player, it was Marcos Llorente. However, **Lionel Messi**'s 30 goals and nine assists saw him break Gerd Muller's record of 30 goals in 12 consecutive seasons, netting 23 league goals alone in 21 matches in 2021.

Barcelona 65 and Sevilla 61. It was now a four-way title race, but with no clear favourite.

And so the drama *really* began. An Atleti defeat to Athletic Bilbao in late April meant Barca could clinch the title if they won their last six games, only for Ronald Koeman's side to throw away a lead against Granada four days later.

Then Atletico's 0-0 draw with the Catalans at the Nou Camp gave Real Madrid the advantage with four games to play, only for Zinedine Zidane's side to draw 2-2 at home with Sevilla via a last-gasp equaliser from Eden Hazard.

Victories for Atletico Madrid over Real Sociedad and Osasuna – the latter thanks to two goals in the final ten minutes and a stoppage-time save from Jan Oblak – saw them needing to match Real's result on the final day of the season to lift the trophy, with Barcelona and Sevilla having already bowed out.

But it wouldn't be Atletico Madrid if they didn't do it the hard way, falling behind after 18 minutes in their clash with the relegation-threatened Real Valladolid. Ostensibly a crushing blow, but one that was softened by Villarreal taking the lead over Real just two minutes later.

At half-time, both teams were down. So far, so adequate for Atleti, but clearly they couldn't rely on Real losing. Thankfully for Simeone, they didn't need to: a smart finish from Angel Correa and a Suarez strike put them ahead with just over 20 minutes to play. As the Uruguayan ran through on goal, Marcos Llorente was stood head in his hands, barely able to watch; how every Atleti fan must have felt in that moment.

It could still quite easily have swung the other way. Real Madrid scored two late goals to win their own game, while Valladolid's Sergi Guardiola missed a great chance in the final minute that would have cost Atleti the title; hardly the lack of drama that Florentino Perez, the Real Madrid president, had referred to just a few weeks earlier when he claimed that 90-minute matches are too long and lack entertainment.

The image of a tearful Suarez, sitting on the ground, on the phone to his family after the final whistle is one that embodies the 2020-21 La Liga season; full of glorious emotion. And how fitting that the Barca castaway was to score the goal that sealed the title. But Atleti's success was clearly a victory for the collective over the individual; a team effort that showed discipline in defence, creativity in midfield, goals in attack and, most importantly, the *Cojones*. Perhaps that would be a more fitting nickname for this new Atleti side than *El Pupas*. Calderon must be grinning in his grave.

It wouldn't be Atletico Madrid if they didn't do it the hard way, falling behind after 18 minutes

Respected...Diego Simeone is given the bumps by his players after their win over Real Valladolid

COACH OF THE SEASON
With club captain Koke and Jose Mario Gimenez the only surviving members of his squad that won the league in 2013-14, **Diego Simeone** has once again proven capable of building a title-winning side. As passionate and energetic as ever, and idolised by the fans.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Newly-promoted Cadiz were a breath of fresh air, beating Real Madrid and taking four points off Barcelona. Barca's **Pedri**, meanwhile, had a dream debut La Liga campaign, featuring in all but one game and earning comparisons with Andres Iniesta.

Boy wonder... Pedri was an ever-present for Ronald Koeman

A decade of dominance in sight

Bayern Munich move to nine titles in a row

Little wonder most pundits describe today's Bundesliga as a one-party state, a championship where competitive imbalance has taken root and foregone conclusions are very much the norm. Bayern have now ruled the domestic roost for nine straight years and this cycle of total Bavarian domination is not likely to end any time soon.

The outcome of the 2020-21 campaign was never in any real doubt. Bayern occupied pole position in no fewer than 28 out of 34 Bundesliga rounds and the men from the Allianz Arena more or less had the title in the bag a good seven weeks from the end of the campaign, effectively propelling themselves over the line in early April with a hard-fought 1-0 win at closest challengers RB Leipzig.

In the final analysis, Bayern simply had too many individual weapons for the opposition to neutralise. The Reds boasted trump cards in spades: outstanding evergreen goalkeeper and captain Manuel Neuer; the drive, strategic brain and leadership of midfield dynamo Joshua Kimmich; Leon Goretzka's emergence as a top-class box-to-box operative; attacking floater Thomas Muller spectacularly rediscovering his mojo; Kingsley Coman arguably in the form of his life on the wing; and Robert Lewandowski, in the richest goalscoring vein of his ten years in the Bundesliga. All told, the Poland hitman piled up an incredible 41 goals, a new domestic league record. The previous mark of 40 goals, set by another Bayern legend Gerd Muller, had stood for almost a half-century.

For the chasing pack (RB Leipzig, Borussia Dortmund, Wolfsburg, Eintracht Frankfurt and Bayer Leverkusen), their task was nigh impossible. While Bayern had nuclear weapons to roll out, all the rest could muster was a pair of moth-eaten boxing gloves.

Bayern did slip up occasionally, notably blotting their copybook when slumping to a 4-1 loss at Hoffenheim on the second weekend of the season and losing early on in the "Spring Championship" at Monchengladbach and Eintracht Frankfurt. But as with all true champions, they would not remain on the canvas for long. This was one hungry Bayern gang, a team that invariably came out slugging in adversity. The best examples of their never-say-die mentality? Come-from-behind wins at Dortmund and Leverkusen, and a 3-3 home draw with Leipzig in December, twice battling back from scoreboard deficits.

Wunderkinds... **Erling Haaland and Jadon Sancho**

Not that every plant in the Bayern garden bloomed last term. In marked contrast to their hugely impressive slick attacking play, the champions were anything but impregnable defensively, often careless in the extreme, vulnerable to counter-attacks and conceding more goals than in any season since 2012. Bayern especially suffered at centre-back, where Jerome Boateng was a little too passive in his marking at times and Niklas Sule revealed a worrying tendency to lose concentration.

In terms of their shape, Bayern frequently were not as compact as they should have been and they paid a heavy price for not playing with a conventional

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

Angelino (RB Leipzig)
Leon Goretzka (Bayern Munich)
Erling Haaland (B. Dortmund)
Dayot Upamecano (RB Leipzig)
Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)
Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich)
Robert Lewandowski (Bayern Munich)
Marvin Friedrich (Union Berlin)
Ridle Baku (Wolfsburg)
Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich)
Silas Wamangituka (Stuttgart)

CUP FINAL

The die was cast early in the 2020-21 DFB-Pokal Cup final between **Borussia Dortmund** and RB Leipzig, with the former 3-0 up at the break. Final score: 4-1, with star forwards Jadon Sancho and Erling Haaland each netting a brace.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

Champions League spots were claimed by **Bayern**, **RB Leipzig**, **Dortmund** and **Wolfsburg**. **Eintracht Frankfurt** and **Bayer Leverkusen** booked Europa League berths, while **Union Berlin** secured a spot in the brand-new Europa Conference League.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS

Two of Germany's best-supported outfits, **Schalke** and **Werder Bremen** - both of whom have European trophies to their name - tumbled out of the top flight. Their places go to **Greuther Furth** and **Bochum**. **Cologne** survived by winning the relegation play-off.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON

Former Bayern skipper Lothar Matthaus was not over-egging the pudding when he recently proclaimed that his old club would have conceded 70 goals this season if **Manuel Neuer** had not been in such great form between the posts.

Talismanic trio...Robert Lewandowski, Thomas Muller and Manuel Neuer

> This cycle of total Bavarian domination is not likely to end any time soon

midfield holder. Joshua Kimmich nominally occupied that role, but in truth operated far further forward. A consequence of Kimmich's all-terrain act was an unguarded back door.

"In certain situations, Kimmich is over-eager," says *Deutschland* Sky pundit Didi Hamann. "He wants to get forward a lot and make things happen. His primary brief is to give the team stability. With Bayern conceding a lot of goals, we have to talk about Kimmich as a No.6."

Bayern were, for the most part, an imbalanced outfit: unstoppable going forward, yet criminally casual with regard to their defensive work. More often than not, they only began to play on going behind. In moments of doubt, they immediately raised their game, quick to find that extra gear or two. They had to be provoked into action.

When on Bundesliga duty, Bayern could often get away with giving the opposition a goal start. Sadly for them, they could not take the same liberties in Europe. Hence their Champions League loss to Paris Saint-Germain at the quarter-final stage of the Champions League.

Bearing in mind the disharmony which reigned in the their corridors of power, Bayern did remarkably well. Thanks to differences of opinion over recruitment issues, coach Hansi Flick and director of sport Hasan Salihamidzic slowly but surely moved to a state of open warfare and in the end, the town was not big enough for both of them – Flick announcing in April that this would be his last season in charge. In 18 months at the helm, Flick enjoyed wall-to-wall success (two league titles, the Champions League last term and the 2020 Club World Cup). However he ultimately grew tired of the political games. A role as Germany's new head coach, confirmed in May, will be much better suited to him. More power, less back-biting.

Player of the Year...Manuel Neuer

COACH OF THE SEASON

In only his second season at the controls of Wolfsburg, **Oliver Glasner** had them punching well above their weight en route to a fourth-place finish. Then, just days after the Bundesliga had finished, the coach jumped ship to take charge of rivals Eintracht Frankfurt.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON

Despite the cruciate ligament injury that brought his season to a premature end in April, Stuttgart's **Silas Wamangituka** did more than enough to earn the tag of top-flight rookie MVP. The 21-year-old is both a mazy dribbler and penalty-box assassin.

Newcomer...Silas Wamangituka

Internazionale end Juve dominance

But financial trouble lies ahead for the 2020-21 Serie A champions

The 2020-21 Serie A season was not just the year of COVID-19. On a much brighter note, it was a history-making season when, for the first time ever, the *Scudetto* was won by a foreign-owned club, namely Internazionale in the ownership of Chinese electronics giant, Suning.

This was the year of Inter, of Antonio Conte and of team talisman, Belgium striker Romelu Lukaku. But it was also the year of the Chinese: a five-year, €650 million investment, following the purchase of Inter in 2016, has reaped success for Suning. Not for nothing, some of the most expensive players in today's Serie A are Inter players – Moroccan wing-back Achraf Hakimi, Argentina striker Lautaro Martinez and of course, Lukaku.

It all finally came good on the first Sunday of May, when Inter claimed their 19th *Scudetto*, with four games still to play. What is more, Inter did not even have to take to the field to clinch the trophy since a 1-1 draw between Sassuolo and second-placed Atalanta, the only side that could theoretically still have caught them, settled the contest.

Dejected...Cristiano Ronaldo

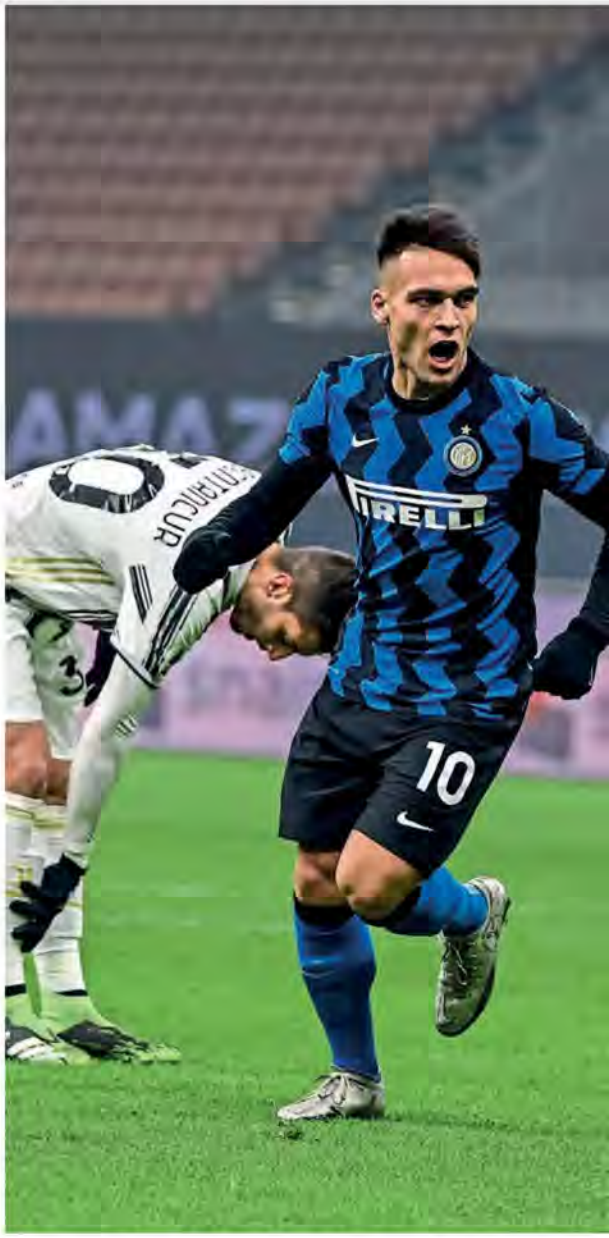
It was a momentous season for Inter in the most arduous of circumstances. In our annual season preview last year, *World Soccer*, like many other critics, asked if the nine-year reign of Juventus was about to end.

Juve had won the 2019-20 title, all right, but their season had ended on an anticlimactic note as they were eliminated at the last-16 stage of the Champions League by Lyon, a team which went on to finish seventh in Ligue 1. Suddenly, Juventus looked less intimidating and if there was a side in Italy equipped to step in and beat them, it could in all reality only be Inter, the only team with a comparably strong squad.

Despite that, though, Inter got off to a bad start. To the surprise of many, it was city cousins Milan who initially led the dance. A dismal autumn campaign was marked by Inter's elimination in a third consecutive Champions League group stage.

The turning point, however, came in February. First, on Valentine's Day, Inter emphatically beat Lazio 3-1 to go one point clear of Milan, taking full advantage of a surprise Milan defeat away to Spezia the day before.

Then one week later came arguably the most decisive moment, when Inter crushed Milan 3-0 in a top-of-the-table derby that really set them on the path to ultimate victory. Inter won nine of their next 11 games to complete a decisive 18-match unbeaten run that led to the title, a run that stretched back to the second game of February, when they lost 2-1 away to Sampdoria. The next time Inter lost came on the second-last



Turning point... Inter beat Juventus 2-0 at the San Siro in January

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

CUP FINAL
At the neutral venue of Reggio Emilia and with just over 4,000 fans in attendance, **Juventus** gained some compensation for a disappointing season with a 2-1 win over Atalanta in an intense cup final to collect their second trophy of the season after the Super Cup.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS
Milan and **Juventus** required final-day wins to join **Inter** and **Atalanta** in the Champions League, edging out **Napoli**, who suffered a fatal 1-1 draw with Verona. They will be joined by **Lazio** in the Europa League, while **Roma** head to the Europa Conference League.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS
This will be the 14th season in Serie A for **Empoli**, a regular yo-yo club. **Salernitana** took second spot in Serie B, while **Venezia** were promoted via the play-offs. Of the three relegated sides, **Parma**, **Benevento** and **Crotone**, only Pippo Inzaghi's Benevento deserved better.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
It is impossible to look beyond Inter's top scorer **Romelu Lukaku**. His pace, physical presence, link-up with Martinez and 24 goals made him as fundamental a part of the Inter success story as their mastermind Antonio Conte.

day of the season, 3-2 to Juventus, but with the *Scudetto* long since won.

If the Milan derby in February was an obvious turning point, Inter had already indicated the seriousness of their title challenge one month earlier with an utterly emphatic 2-0 home win against that same Juventus. Freed of any European cup commitments, Inter found a rhythm, a sense of self-belief and a devastating killer instinct that began in the depths of winter and never let up.

> Freed of any European cup commitments, Inter found a rhythm, a sense of self-belief

Of course there are many significant protagonists in this success story. For a start, there is Lukaku. A total, almost indomitable force of nature, Romelu not only scored 24 goals for Inter, but his partnership with Martinez was worth 41. Newly-arrived coach Conte had insisted in the summer of 2019 that the club purchase the former Everton and Manchester United player.

Behind them, the deep defensive wall formed by Milan Skriniar, Stefan de Vrij and Alessandro Bastoni, the impressive work-rate of Nicolo Barella in midfield, the playmaking of Marcelo Brozovic, rediscovered schemer Christian Eriksen, and the blistering pace of Moroccan Hakimi on the right were all clearly fundamental.

Arguably, though, no one made a bigger contribution than manager Conte, who parted ways with the club just three weeks after winning the title. While Inter fans must recognise what he achieved in a two-year spell, there are those who believe financial and personal success are his main motivators. He wanted to further strengthen the squad and become a serious Champions League challenger, but Suning are still coming to terms with a COVID-affected 2020 that saw a €3.9 billion loss.

On the week after Inter won the title, Inter president Steven Zhang (son of the major Suning shareholder Zhang Jindong) met with his players to discuss a 15 per cent austerity cutback, asking them to temporarily forgo two months' salary. In that same week, though, Inter secured a three-year, €275m loan from the Oaktree Capital Management fund, money that will secure players' wages and bankroll transfer market plans.

As for now, Inter fans can rejoice over the winning of their 19th title, their first since Jose Mourinho (on his way back to Italian football at Roma, incidentally) led them to the 2010 treble of Serie A, the Coppa Italia and Champions League. Thus, too, the curtain went down on nine years of unprecedented Juventus dominance.

Title winner...Antonio Conte

COACH OF THE SEASON
De Zerbi at Sassuolo, Juric at Verona, Pioli at Milan and Gattuso at Napoli all deserve a special mention but no coach made more of an impact than **Antonio Conte** at Inter. Terrifyingly driven and utterly inspirational, this title was his *capolavoro* – masterpiece.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Injuries and COVID interrupted debut seasons for both Brahim Diaz of Milan and Napoli's Victor Osimhen, but no newcomer impressed as much as Inter's **Achraf Hakimi**, whose pace on the right flank proved a powerful weapon in Conte's armoury.

Coppa Italia victors... Juventus

Lille bring PSG's era to an end

But coach Galtier isn't sticking around

Paris Saint-Germain's recent domestic dominance finally came to an end on Sunday, May 23. After three consecutive successful league campaigns for the capital club it was Lille who wrestled the title from their grasp, winning 2-1 away at Angers to finish the 38-game season one solitary point ahead of Mauricio Pochettino's team.

PSG won their final game 2-0 away at Brest, but a goal from the Canadian Jonathan David and a penalty calmly tucked away by Turkish striker Burak Yilmaz saw Lille over the line. Coach Christophe Galtier's team landed the club's first Ligue 1 title since 2011 and the fourth in their history. Lille's success was built on a superb defensive display throughout the campaign that saw the team lose just three matches and concede only 23 league goals. It's true that the champions drew 11 games, but with PSG losing a whopping eight times it was still enough to claim the title.

Lille captain Jose Fonte was suspended for the final match after picking up three yellow cards in ten matches. But the Portuguese defender was quick to hail his side's campaign as "a victory for our collective spirit, our solidarity, our work ethic and our talent." Galtier, meanwhile, looked visibly drained as he looked back on his successful season. "We knew that Paris would win at Brest," said the 54-year-old. "So it was down to us to win away, as we've done many times this season with this marvellous group of players."

PSG coach Pochettino was quick to offer his congratulations to the new champions, but also didn't pull any punches when admitting: "Throughout the season we dropped points that we shouldn't have done. But we need to keep things in perspective. Right to the end we were fighting in all competitions. But it's disappointing not to have won the league."

In spite of his success, Galtier will not attempt to defend the title with Lille. After spending the last few weeks of the season batting away questions about his future, the Marseille native confirmed that he would head south to replace Adrian Ursea as head coach of Nice. Jumping ship from the club that finished first to one in ninth may seem like an odd move, but Nice are a club with deep pockets and grand ambitions. Even greater things could lie ahead for him if he is able to achieve more success on the Cote d'Azur.

Of course a Ligue 1 season would not be complete without a scandal at Marseille. This campaign's crazy moment happened in February when coach Andre Villas-Boas gave an emotional press conference explaining that the club had bought a player, Olivier Ntcham, whom he'd specifically rejected. "I was against the signing and only learned of it when I read the press this morning," he said. The Portuguese then announced that he wanted to leave the club as soon as possible. "I don't want anything from Marseilles. I don't want money." A few hours later he was gone, replaced by Argentine Jorge Sampaoli. Much-reviled club president Jacques-Henri Eyraud also left, with sporting director Pablo Longoria stepping up to fill the role aged just 34.

Turning point...Neymar is distraught following April's season-defining 1-0 home defeat to Lille

Champions...Lille players celebrate their title win

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

Reinildo Mandava (Lille)
Aurelien Tchouameni (Monaco)
Neymar (PSG)
Sven Botman (Lille)
Keylor Navas (PSG)
Lucas Paqueta (Lyon)
Memphis Depay (Lyon)
Marquinhos (PSG)
Jonathan Clauss (Lens)
Benjamin Andre (Lille)
Kylian Mbappe (PSG)

CUP FINAL

It was a disappointing campaign overall for **PSG**, but they did at least capture the Coupe de France with a convincing 2-0 win over Monaco. Goals from Mauro Icardi and, inevitably, Kylian Mbappe, secured the trophy, the sixth time in the last seven seasons that PSG have won the competition.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

Lille will compete in the Champions League group phase alongside **PSG**. **Monaco**, who finished third, will have to qualify to join them. **Lyon** finished fourth to make it into the Europa League along with **Marseille**, while **Rennes** will compete in the new Europa Conference League.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS

Dijon and **Nimes** were relegated, the former anchored at the bottom of the table with a dismal 21-point haul. **Nantes** finished 18th but retained their top-flight status after victory in the play-offs. **Troyes** were promoted as Ligue 2 champions, with **Clermont** coming up in second place.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON

Who else but phenomenal PSG goal machine **Kylian Mbappe**? His league tally of 27 goals and seven assists in just 31 games speaks for itself, and he won the award for the division's top goalscorer for the third consecutive season.

Lille's success was built on a superb defensive display...that saw the team lose just three matches and concede only 23 league goals

Sampaoli helped settle the ship, but expectations for next season will be sky high. The club are committed to building a squad that can challenge deadly rivals PSG and they've said they aren't afraid to spend money on young talent. With star player Florian Thauvin leaving for Mexican outfit Tigres the club's demanding fans will not be in the mood to forgive any missteps. The word is that Flamengo midfielder Gerson will be the first of many new signings for a fee of around €30 million.

There was similar managerial drama at Nantes as well, who finished in 18th but stayed up after beating Toulouse in the relegation play-offs. The controversial president of *Les Canaris*, Waldemar Kita, can shoulder much of the blame for a difficult season, having sacked not one, but two coaches during the campaign. Christian Gourcuff went in December, and former national team coach Raymond Domenech – who hadn't managed in Ligue 1 since 1993 – lasted just six weeks, winning none of his eight games in charge.

Former player Antoine Kombouare took charge in February, and guided the club to five wins from their last six games to avoid automatic relegation. How he rebuilds over the summer will be key, with much work ahead for the eight-time Ligue 1 champions.

It will also be interesting to see how Lens move forward next campaign. The club that was promoted in 2020 finished in seventh place this time around, and with supporters due back in stadiums for the start of next season, their passionate fan base could push the team to even greater heights. Star right-back Jonathan Clauss even made it into the French professional footballers' Team of the Season.

Title winner...Christophe Galtier

COACH OF THE SEASON
Christophe Galtier's performance in leading Lille to the title ahead of the PSG juggernaut shows just what an astute operator he is. His ability to improve young players and keep everyone calm and focused when the pressure was on was genuinely impressive.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
21-year-old striker **Amine Gouiri** has enjoyed an excellent first full season in Ligue 1, having joined Nice from Lyon for just €7 million in July 2020. His return of 12 goals and seven assists in an average side was highly impressive.

Impressive... Nice striker Amine Gouiri

Changing of the guard

Winds of change see Sporting bounce back to the top of the tree in Portugal

The 2020-21 campaign was very different to recent seasons in Portugal, and not only because of the COVID-19 pandemic, empty stadiums and a uniquely condensed schedule. After almost two decades, Sporting finally broke Benfica and Porto's stranglehold on the title. Manager Ruben Amorim worked a minor miracle by coaching the Lions to a first championship triumph since 2001-02, despite a vastly inferior squad in terms of market value and trophy-winning experience than the usual Primeira Liga contenders.

This was no fluke though. The Lions hit the top of the standings early on, won the Portuguese League Cup in January, and were universally acclaimed as deserved champions following victory over Boavista in May. Sporting showed remarkable consistency, losing just once in the penultimate match of the season – a 4-3 thriller away to city rivals Benfica. A seemingly never-ending succession of late goals proved the key to the triumph, with Sporting earning an incredible 20 extra points with goals scored after the 80th minute.

Creative king...Ryan Gauld

The fact that a host of players from the club's famous Alcochete academy played a starring role, together with Amorim's categorical affirmation that he will be staying at Alvalade no matter what offers come his way, will make Sporting fans confident that this season's achievements can signal a turning point in the Lisbon club's fortunes, and that the wild title-winning celebrations among the green half of the football-loving residents of the Portuguese capital can become a more frequent occurrence.

While Ruben Amorim takes the plaudits as the manager of the season, special mention must be made of Ivo Vieira, who was appointed at Famalicao in March with the northern club deep in relegation trouble, sitting second from bottom in the standings.

The turnaround under the 45-year-old coach was immediate and stunning. Famalicao kicked clear of the drop zone with several matches to spare, and even went into the final game of the season with a shot of qualifying for Europe. It is another feather in the cap of the Madeira-born coach, on the back of impressive work at Maritimo and Vitoria Guimaraes. Remember the name.

With talk of reducing Portugal's Primeira Liga from 18 to 16 teams gathering pace, avoiding relegation became more important than ever with the level of difficulty in making it back up likely to increase significantly in the near future. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the battle to beat the drop was fiercer than ever. Going into the final round of matches, only one club had been confirmed as relegated and four teams were still scrambling to survive.

Sporting hero... Ruben Amorim celebrates with his players

Algarve outfit Farense lost the struggle to retain their top-flight status, but it was not for the want of trying by their Scottish captain Ryan Gauld. The 25-year-old creative midfielder was

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

Nuno Mendes (Sporting)
Ryan Gauld (Farense)
Mehdi Taremi (Porto)
Sebastian Coates (Sporting)
Agustin Marchesin (Porto)
Sergio Oliveira (Porto)
Haris Seferovic (Benfica)
Pepe (Porto)
Pedro Porro (Sporting)
Joao Palhinha (Sporting)
Pedro Goncalves (Sporting)

CUP FINAL

After losing in the Portuguese League Cup final to Sporting, **Braga** fared better in Portugal's premier cup competition by defeating Benfica 2-0 in the Portuguese Cup final. Goals by Lucas Piazon and Ricardo Horta were enough for Braga to claim victory in Coimbra.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

Top two **Sporting** and **Porto** will play in the Champions League, but **Benfica** must negotiate qualifying to join them. Perennial Europa League side **Braga** are in the competition again. **Pacos de Ferreira** and **Santa Clara** go into the new Conference League.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS

Last season's promoted clubs **Nacional da Madeira** and **Farense** both went straight back down. **Estoril** and **Vizela** replace them in the top flight for 2021-22, while **Arouca** joined them after thrashing **Rio Ave** in the relegation/promotion play-offs.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON

Sporting captain **Sebastian Coates** was the rock on which the meanest defence in the country was built, and also impacted at the other end of the pitch, scoring five league goals during the campaign. An authentic Lion, the Uruguayan's leadership qualities came to the fore.

Ruben Amorim worked a minor miracle by coaching the Lions to a first championship triumph since 2001-02, despite a vastly inferior squad

magnificent, undoubtedly one of the players of the season in Portugal. Gauld won more man-of-the-match awards than any other player in the league (nine in a 34-game season), created more chances than any other player (74), and was involved in a staggering 52 per cent (nine goals, six assists) of his team's total goals in 2020-21.

Gauld's story is one of perseverance to make his name in Portugal, even though circumstances often appeared to be conspiring against him. Untimely injuries, successful loan spells cut short because of club politics, unfavourable mid-season coach changes are just some of the obstacles not of his own making he has had to contend with. The fact he has learned perfect Portuguese and immersed himself in the local culture only adds to the respect he has garnered throughout the country.

Ultimately his season ended in heartbreak, with his team relegated by a 4-0 defeat to Santa Clara on the same day he was left out of Scotland's Euro 2020 squad, but there is a bright future ahead for him. A summer transfer is inevitable. Initially signed by Sporting as a teenage wonderkid, rumours are rife that Gauld will be targeted by Portugal's biggest clubs again this summer. Given the excellence of his performances in 2020-21, competition for his signature will likely come from far and wide.

Best newcomer...Mario Gonzalez

COACH OF THE SEASON
A phenomenally successful season saw **Ruben Amorim** become the first manager to guide Sporting to the title for 19 years, against all expectations, in his first full season as a top-flight manager. Also won the Portuguese League Cup.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
After struggling to break through at Villarreal, Spanish striker **Mario Gonzalez** tried his luck across the border. Injuries and COVID-19 meant a sketchy start to the season, but Gonzalez found his groove and flourished at modest outfit Tondela.

Title-winning captain...Coates

Ajax in a league of their own

Amsterdam club set for an era of dominance

Ajax clinching the double was never a surprise this season. With rivals simply making too many mistakes the outcome was inevitable. More interesting is the question of whether the Amsterdam giants would also have collected European silverware if it wasn't for mistakes made off the pitch. What would have happened if Andre Onana hadn't been suspended for failing a doping test? How much would their firepower have been boosted if the team manager hadn't omitted to register Sebastien Haller for the European tournaments? After all, European football was the reason to send a £20 million cheque to West Ham United. Most likely Ajax wouldn't have been eliminated in the group phase of the Champions League, while they would have at least reached the semi-finals in the Europa League.

So, there are only celebrations for domestic silverware. However, their 35th league title won't be their last: Ajax are gradually becoming a league of their own, in danger of making the Eredivisie as predictable as the German Bundesliga where Bayern Munich reign.

Lately, Ajax are the only Dutch club really benefitting from UEFA's European football revenues with the team reaching the latter stages of either the Champions League or Europa League time and time again. It gives technical director Marc Overmars the money to sign the players he wants, while also ensuring that their top talents command bigger fees too.

It's not surprising that rivals are looking for off-the-pitch opportunities to close this increasing gap. PSV will collect approximately €50 million extra by committing to new investors, while Feyenoord are still setting their hopes on Feyenoord City, a megalomaniac project including a bigger stadium (63,000 seats), although the finances seem to be a problem.

However, it isn't just off the pitch that the others should step up. It's on it as well. Ajax were never in danger and with the shrewd Erik ten Hag at the helm, the majority of the squad are getting better every season. Upcoming players like Ryan Gravenberch, Jurrien Timber and Devyne Rensch are already or will be internationals, while skipper Dusan Tadic and veteran Daley Blind are the right people to help make them better. Along with some South American passion in the form of Nicolas Tagliafico, Lisandro Martinez and Antony, Ajax have the right blend.

PSV, eventually, secured the Netherlands' Champions League preliminary ticket, but much more was expected of the Eindhoven club. They brought in Roger Schmidt, a much heralded German coach who was once mentioned as a potential national team coach during the disastrous post Danny Blind era a few years ago. In came former world champion Mario Gotze too, but somehow it never led to the desired results. Gotze proved to be injury-prone, while Schmidt's methods and performances created resentment with referees and players. The German's idea of coaching is that players should adapt to his system while the reverse

Disappointment...PSV signing Mario Gotze

Dominant...Ajax celebrate lifting the trophy

THE BREAKDOWN

TEAM OF THE SEASON

Daley Blind (Ajax)
Joey Veerman (Heerenveen)
Dusan Tadic (Ajax)
Riechedly Bazoer (Vitesse)
Romko Pasveer (Vitesse)
Davy Klaassen (Ajax)
Giorgos Giakoumakis (VVV-Venlo)
Ahmed Touba (RKC Waalwijk)
Denzel Dumfries (PSV)
Ryan Gravenberch (Ajax)
Steven Berghuis (Feyenoord)

CUP FINAL

Ajax clinched the double (and their 20th national cup) by beating Vitesse 2-1 in the final. The difference in quality was wider than the score would suggest, with David Neres' stoppage-time goal settling matters after Vitesse defender Jacob Rasmussen was sent off.

EUROPEAN QUALIFIERS

Ajax will enter the Champions League while **PSV** will have to go through the qualifiers to join them. Third-placed **AZ** will play Europa League preliminaries, while **Vitesse** will try to reach the new Europa Conference League along with play-off winners **Feyenoord**.

RELEGATED AND PROMOTED TEAMS

Cambuur are back in the Eredivisie and are joined by **Go Ahead Eagles** who sealed the deal on the last day. **ADO Den Haag** and **VVV-Venlo**, despite Giakoumakis' heroics, went down. **Emmen** later joined them after losing in the relegation/promotion play-offs, won by **NEC**.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON

It looked like the free-scoring **Giorgos Giakoumakis** (the Eredivisie top scorer with 26 goals) would keep VVV-Venlo in the league singlehandedly. However, in the end, even the 26-year-old Greece striker couldn't conceal the fact that the Venlo club lacked the quality to stay up.

With the shrewd Erik ten Hag at the Ajax helm, the majority of the squad are getting better every season

would be a better idea. The biggest disappointment is his difficult relationship with Mohamed Ihattaren, once PSV's nest egg but now almost chased out of Eindhoven.

Unlike Schmidt, another German coach, Thomas Letsch, did make the most of it at Vitesse. The club, known as "FC Hollywood on the Rhine", is often in turmoil and was, as Chelsea's satellite club, always depending on who would be sent over from Stamford Bridge. Sometimes they were good (Mason Mount), sometimes it was a wasted effort, but it was never an ideal situation for a coach to build a team. However, Letsch did a fine job by squeezing the best out of eternal *enfants terribles* Riechedly Bazoer and Oussama Tannane. It paid off with a cup final spot and a European football ticket.

And with arch-rivals Feyenoord forced to press the reset button, with veteran coach Dick Advocaat – in his last job before retirement – even unable to deliver a decent performance from the club, you don't have to be a genius to realise that not much should be expected from Rotterdam next season.

Overlooking the opposition, it's crystal clear that Ajax will be the favourites next season as well. Backed by ten Hag renewing his contract and being one of Europe's healthiest clubs, anything less than a new national title would be a major failure.

It takes more than a few hiccups, like the Onana or Haller case – not to forget offloading forward Quincy Promes to Spartak Moscow after being a suspect in a stabbing incident – to chase the Amsterdam club from the Dutch throne.

One to watch...Ahmed Touba

COACH OF THE SEASON
For once it remained relatively calm at Vitesse. All credit must go to coach **Thomas Letsch**, who managed to get the best out of *enfants terribles* Riechedly Bazoer and Ousmane Tannane. A run to the cup final and entering the new Conference League is his reward.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
RKC Waalwijk's French born and Belgian raised defender of Algerian stock **Ahmed Touba** was dubbed by pundit Pierre van Hooijdonk as a pearl in the lower echelons of the league. His goals and stylish play have attracted the interest of several top clubs.

Goal king... Giakoumakis

	LEAGUE CHAMPIONS	TOP SCORER	BEST OF THE REST
Albania KATEGORIA SUPERIORE	The Albanian title race went down to the wire with Partizani Tirana, Vllaznia Shkoder and **Teuta Durres** all in contention on the final week. Teuta secured their second title in history on goal difference.	A hat-trick from former Albania Under-21 winger **Dejvi Bregu** in the final gameweek was enough to place him at the top of the goalscoring charts above Kukesi duo Patrick Friday Eze and Agim Ibraimi by a single strike.	**Vllaznia** may have missed out on the league trophy, but their consolation prize was to get their hands on the Albanian Cup. Victor da Silva's strike was the difference in a tight 1-0 victory over Skenderbeu in the final.
Austria BUNDESLIGA	Seven-time defending champions **RB Salzburg** were victorious again, recording a 7-1 home win over Hartberg and an 8-2 away win over St. Polten en route to the title and reaching the Champions League play-off rounds.	In-demand Zambia striker **Patson Daka** scored a career-high 27 goals to finish at the top of the scoring charts for the first time in his early career, while he was also named the league's Player of the Season for 2020-21.	Certainly another season to remember for **RB Salzburg**, they put in a dominant second-half performance over LASK in the Austrian Cup final to win 3-0 and record their third straight league and cup double.
Belgium FIRST DIVISION A	After finishing 16 points clear at the end of the regular season, **Club Brugge** stumbled over the line to claim back-to-back titles, winning just once in the championship round, and losing to runners-up Genk on the final day.	In contrast, Genk ended the season extremely strongly, losing only one of their last 21 games, thanks largely to the goalscoring form of **Paul Onuachu**, who topped the scoring charts with 33 goals.	**Genk** were successful in the Belgian Cup, sealing a 2-1 win over Standard Liege in the final. They go to Champions League qualifying, with **Antwerp** in the Europa League and **Anderlecht** and **Gent** in the new Conference.
Bosnia-Herzegovina PREMIER LEAGUE	**Borac Banja Luka** won only their second title in the club's history, finishing two points above reigning champions Sarajevo. Their title-clinching victory over Tuzla City was their first in front of fans in a year and led to a pitch invasion.	Despite the efforts of the league's top goalscorer, **Nemanja Bilbija**, Zrinjski Mostar were unable to finish the season in one of the four European qualifying spots. They lost out to Siroki Brijeg on the head-to-head rule.	**Mladost Doboj Kakanj** initially avoided relegation to the Prva Liga FBiH, but were then relegated due to failing to obtain a licence for the Premier League. They will join bottom club **Olimpik** in the second tier.
Bulgaria FIRST LEAGUE	**Ludogorets** clinched a record tenth successive league title to register the longest current run in Europe. They have the European record in their sights, shared by Lincoln Red Imps (Gibraltar) and Skonto Riga (Latvia) on 14.	Romania striker **Claudiu Keseru** ended the season with the top goalscorer prize for the third time in his six-season spell at Ludogorets. He took his league goal tally at the club to 113 strikes in 169 appearances.	After losing out in last season's final to Lokomotiv Plovdiv, **CSKA Sofia** made amends in the 2020-21 Bulgarian Cup final. They knocked out Ludogorets in the semi-finals, before beating Arda Kardzhali 1-0 in the final in the capital.
Croatia PRVA HNL	**Dinamo Zagreb** won their fourth league title in a row. It was a dramatic season for the capital club as they beat Tottenham Hotspur in the Europa League days after coach Zoran Mamic was handed a four-year prison sentence.	Osijek came second to record their best-ever league finish, much due to the displays of the league's top goalscorer **Ramon Mierez**. The Argentinian forward has joined on a permanent deal following his loan spell from Alaves.	The 2021 Croatian Cup final was deserving of supporters. **Dinamo Zagreb** led Istra 1961 3-0 at half-time, but the underdogs pulled three goals back in 12 minutes. A strong finish saw Zagreb win 6-3 in Velika Gorica.
Cyprus FIRST DIVISION	**Omonia Nicosia** came out on top in both the regular season and the championship round to win their 21st national championship. It was manager Henning Berg's first trophy in Cyprus since arriving in 2019.	Finland striker **Berat Sadik** topped the scoring charts with 18 goals, in spite of his side, Doxa, finishing in the bottom half. Nicolas Diguiny was next on the list with 17 goals for runners-up Apollon Limassol.	**Anorthosis Famagusta** qualified for the Europa League by winning the Cypriot Cup, with **Apollon** and **AEL Limassol** heading to the Conference League. Karmiotissa, ENP, Ermis Aradippou and N. Salamis Famagusta went down.

	LEAGUE CHAMPIONS	TOP SCORER	BEST OF THE REST
Czech Republic FIRST LEAGUE	**Slavia Prague** didn't just finish the season as the champions; they ended it as unbeaten champions. They also recorded a new Czech and Czechoslovak domestic league record by going 41 games without a single defeat.	Nothing could separate Prague derby and Czech Republic team-mates **Adam Hlozek** and **Jan Kuchta** in the race to be top scorer. The Sparta and Slavia Prague players respectively, were tied on 15 strikes each.	Fourth-placed **Slovacko** recorded their best-ever finish and will enter the Europa Conference League qualifiers with **Viktoria Plzen**. Runners-up **Sparta** join Slavia in CL qualifying while **Jablonec** go into the Europa League qualifiers.
Denmark SUPERLIGA	**Brondby** brought an end to their 16-year title drought with a 2-0 win over Nordsjaelland, with supporters piling on to the pitch to celebrate at the final whistle. They finished just one point ahead of Midtjylland.	*Drengene fra Vestegnen* forward **Mikael Uhre** finished as the league's top goalscorer on 19 goals, four strikes above AGF's Patrick Mortensen and Copenhagen's Jonas Wind. It marked a new personal best for Uhre.	**Midtjylland** qualified for the Champions League second qualifying round, **Copenhagen** and **AGF** made the Conference League qualifiers and Danish Cup winners **Randers** will plays in the Europa League play-offs.
Greece SUPER LEAGUE	**Olympiakos** comfortably secured the Greek Super League title, finishing 26 points clear of PAOK with a monstrous +63 goal difference. It's their 46th title, which accounts for 54 per cent of every year in the league's history.	Morocco striker **Youssef El-Arabi** picked up his second Golden Boot in a row to fire Olympiakos to the title. The 34-year-old was ably supported by Kostas Fortounis, the league's most creative player with 11 assists.	**PAOK** denied Olympiakos a double thanks to a 90th-minute winner in the Greek Cup final. They will be joined in the Conference League by **Aris Thessaloniki** and **AEK Athens**, while fifth-placed Panathinaikos missed out.
Hungary NB I	**Ferencvaros**, Hungary's most decorated club, won their third league title in a row, losing only once. They took the lead in October and never left top spot, wrapping up the title in April to finish 20 points clear of Puskas Akademia.	Paks' **Janos Hahn** was comfortably the league's top scorer with 22 goals in 26 games. The Hungarian also hit three hat-tricks en route to the Golden Boot, ultimately beating Fehervar striker Nemanja Nikolic by seven goals.	Seven-time champions **Debrecen** will return to the top flight in 2021-22 after a year's absence. **Ujpest** won the cup for the 11th time, and enter qualifying for the Europa Conference League, with **Puskas** and **Fehervar**.
Israel PREMIER LEAGUE	**Maccabi Haifa** won Israel's title after a 3-2 home win against Hapoel Be'er Sheva. It marked the club's 13th title, and the first since 2011, and secured them a spot in the Champions League first qualifying round.	Ukraine-born winger **Nikita Rukavytsya**, who plays for Australia, won the Golden Boot for a second season in a row after scoring 19 league goals; seven more than the next best forwards.	The 2021 Israeli State Cup final saw Tel Aviv arch-rivals Maccabi and Hapoel meet at the Bloomfield Stadium, with **Maccabi Tel Aviv** coming out on top thanks to a 2-1 win after extra-time.
Luxembourg NATIONAL DIVISION	F91 Dudelange's four-year dominance was ended by **Fola Esch**, who beat bitter rivals Jeunesse Esch 3-0 on the final day of the season to win the National Division. They finished two points clear of F91 Dudelange.	Fola Esch's **Zachary Hadji** was the attacking force behind his side's title win with 33 goals in 27 appearances. As well as averaging a goal every 61 minutes, the forward also provided nine assists for his team-mates.	After missing out on the title, **F91 Dudelange** and **Swift Hesperange** joined **Racing** in qualifying for the Europa Conference League second qualifying round. For the second season running, the cup was abandoned.
Malta PREMIER LEAGUE	On April 9, the season was abandoned due to COVID-19. **Hamrun Spartans**, who were five points clear at the top after 23 games played, were crowned champions for the eighth time – their first title since 1991.	**Kevin Rosero** of Santa Lucia was awarded the Golden Boot after scoring 17 goals in 22 games before the season was halted. The Colombian was three goals clear of Mosta's Bojan Kaljevic.	**Senglea Athletic** were relegated with just two points, and went down with **Zejtun Corinthians**, **Tarxien Rainbows** and **Lija Athletic**. **Hibernians**, **Gzira** and **Birkirkara** qualified for the Conference League. The cup was abandoned.

	LEAGUE CHAMPIONS	TOP SCORER	BEST OF THE REST
Montenegro FIRST LEAGUE	**Buducnost** were the runaway leaders of the league, losing only five games all season and finishing 28 points clear of second-placed Sutjeska. They've now won the league title five times – a national record.	**Bozo Markovic** topped the scoring charts with 16 goals in 29 games, in spite of his side, Sutjeska, missing out on the title. Buducnost's Drasko Bozovic finished just one goal behind on 15.	**Buducnost** became the first team in the country's history to win the double after beating Decic 3-1 in the Montenegrin Cup final. **Sutjeska**, **Decic** and **Podgorica** enter qualifying for the inaugural Europa Conference League.
Northern Ireland PREMIERSHIP	A draw with Coleraine saw **Linfield** make it three in a row as David Healy's side moved level with Rangers on a joint world-record of 55 titles. They've now won the NIFL seven times – four more than rivals Crusaders.	22-year-old striker **Shayne Lavery**'s 23 goals for Linfield saw him become the first player to win both the Ulster Footballer of the Year and Young Player of the Year awards in the same season.	**Linfield** secured a domestic league and cup double after beating Larne 2-1 in the final of the Irish Cup. Third-placed **Glentoran** joined runners-up **Coleraine** in entering qualifying for the Conference League.
North Macedonia FIRST FOOTBALL LEAGUE	**Shkendija** were the runaway winners of the league, losing only twice all season and finishing 16 points clear of second-placed Shkupi to claim their fourth national league title.	**Besart Ibraimi** was the top scorer in the division and his goals were pivotal in Shkendija's pursuit of the title. The 34-year-old strikers's tally of 24 goals was greater than bottom club Belasica managed all season.	As well as **Belasica**, defending champions **Vardar** were relegated to the second tier following 29 years in the first division. **Sileks** later joined them after losing their relegation play-off.
Poland EKSTRAKLASA	**Legia Warsaw** won their seventh title in nine years to set a new record for Polish leagues (15), moving clear of Gornik Zabrze. 64 points was enough to retain the title, with Rakow Czestochowa runners-up on 59.	Czech forward **Tomas Pekhart** scored 22 goals to guide the champions to victory. The Legia Warsaw frontman also picked up the March Player of the Month award to earn a squad place at Euro 2020.	**Lech Poznan** had a disappointing season, finishing 11th just a year after coming second. **Rakow Czestochowa** won the Polish Cup, while bottom club **Podbeskidzie Bielsko-Biala** were relegated.
Romania LIGA I	**CFR Cluj** continued to dominate in Romania by winning their fourth league title in a row, finishing nine points clear of second-placed FCSB in the play-off round. They have now won seven titles overall.	Even though they weren't able to win the title, FCSB still had the league's top goalscorer on their books in the form of **Florin Tanase**. The 26-year-old striker netted 24 goals – six more than Arges' Cephas Malele.	**Universitatea Craiova** won the Romanian Cup for the eighth time after beating Astra Giurgiu 3-2 in extra-time. They enter qualifying for the Europa Conference League alongside **FCSB** and **Sepsi**.
Russia PREMIER LEAGUE	**Zenit** clinched their third title in a row, finishing eight points clear of Spartak Moscow. The Saint Petersburg club have now won the Premier League seven times since it was formed in 1992 – three short of Spartak's record.	For the second season in a row, Zenit powerhouse **Artem Dzyuba** won the Golden Boot with 20 league goals, one ahead of team-mate Sardar Azmoun. The pair accounted for more than half the champions' goals.	**Lokomotiv Moscow** qualified for the Europa League by winning the Russian Cup, while **Rubin Kazan** and **Sochi** will play in the Conference League. **CSKA Moscow** missed out on European football for the first time since 2002.
Scotland PREMIERSHIP	Steven Gerrard guided **Rangers** to their first league title in ten years in style, completing the season without a single defeat. Celtic's failure to defend their title, and win an historic tenth in a row, cost Neil Lennon his job.	Four Rangers players – Kemar Roofe, Alfredo Morelos, James Tavernier and Ryan Kent – struck double figures, but none of them managed as many as **Odsonne Edouard**, who scored 18 goals for Celtic.	It was an historic season for **St. Johnstone**, who won both the Scottish Cup and League Cup. They thereby qualified for the Europa League, with **Aberdeen** and **Hibernian** in the Conference. **Kilmarnock** and **Hamilton** went down.

	LEAGUE CHAMPIONS	TOP SCORER	BEST OF THE REST
Serbia SUPERLIGA	**Red Star Belgrade** robbed Celtic's Invincibles of their world-record points total by winning their last three games to end a remarkable season with 108 points. Dejan Stankovic's side won 35 out of their 38 games.	Surprisingly, the league's top goalscorer didn't even come from a team inside the top four. Radnik Surdulica's **Milan Makaric** netted 25 goals - seven more than Nenad Lukic, Takuma Asano and Milan Bojovic who all scored 18.	**Red Star Belgrade**'s dominance extended to the Serbian Cup as they beat rivals Partizan 4-3 on penalties in the final. **Partizan** enter qualifying for the Conference League alongside **Cukaricki** and **Vojvodina**.
Slovakia FIRST FOOTBALL LEAGUE	**Slovan Bratislava** won the First Football League title in the penultimate round of the season. Bratislava sacked Darko Milanic prior to the game, meaning Vladimir Weiss Sr. won the club's third straight title on his debut.	Nobody scored more goals than Zilina's **Dawid Kurminowski**. The 22-year-old netted 19 goals, including a crucial opener in the semi-finals of the Europa Conference League play-offs against Sered.	**Zilina**'s success in the Europa Conference League play-offs saw them join **DAC Dunajska Streda** and **Spartak Trnava** in entering qualifying. **Slovan Bratislava** completed the domestic double.
Slovenia PRVA LIGA	**Mura** were crowned champions of Slovenia for the first time in the club's history after they beat 15-time winners Maribor 3-1 on the last day of the season. Both clubs ended on 63 points, but Mura won on head-to-heads.	It wasn't a season for goalscorers as Maribor's **Jan Mlakar** and Koper's **Nardin Mulahusejnovic** finished joint-top scorers with just 14 goals each. Dario Kolobaric wasn't too far behind with 12 goals for Domzale.	**Olimpija Ljubljana** beat Celje 2-1 in the final of the Slovenian Cup in Koper. They enter qualifying for the Europa Conference League alongside second-placed **Maribor** and fourth-placed **Domzale**.
Switzerland SUPER LEAGUE	**Young Boys** made it four in a row by winning their 15th Super League title - finishing 31 points clear of second-placed Basle. They only lost two games all season and had by far the best goal difference in the league.	The league's top goalscorer came from Young Boys in the form of 28-year-old striker **Jean-Pierre Nsame**. The two-cap Cameroon international scored 19 goals, one more than Basle's Arthur Cabral.	**Basle** and **Servette** enter qualifying for the Europa Conference League and are joined by **Luzern** who qualified via winning the Swiss Cup.
Turkey SUPER LIG	**Beskitas** won their 16th title by the finest of margins in nail-biting fashion. They finished level on points with Istanbul rivals Galatasaray, but were handed the trophy by a single goal on goal difference.	24-year-old Gabon winger **Aaron Boupendza** caught the eye by scoring 22 goals for sixth-placed Hatayspor, forming a devastating attack with Mame Biram Diouf, the league's next-most prolific player with 19.	**Besiktas** wrapped up the double with a 2-0 win over Antayaspor in the Turkish Cup final. They head to the Champions League group stages, with **Galatasaray** in the qualifiers and **Fenerbahce** in the Europa League.
Ukraine PREMIER LEAGUE	**Dynamo Kiev** won a record-extending 16th Ukrainian Premier League to end Shakhtar Donetsk's four-year reign as champions, losing just once all season. Mircea Lucescu's side hadn't won the league since 2015-16.	Vorskla Poltava's 28-year-old striker **Vladyslav Kulach** produced the best season of his career to finish top of the scoring charts with 15 goals, three ahead of Dynamo's highly-rated winger Viktor Tsyhankov.	**Dynamo** won the double by lifting the Ukrainian Cup. **Shakhtar** will go into the Champions League qualifying rounds, with **Zorya Luhansk** qualifying for the Europa league play-offs, while **Mynai** were relegated.
Wales PREMIER LEAGUE	**Connah's Quay Nomads** beat Penybont 2-0 on the last day of the season to win their second title in a row. Andy Morrison's side finished two points clear of The New Saints, and will attempt to qualify for the Champions League.	Bala Town's **Chris Venables** scored 24 goals to win the Golden Boot, finishing six clear of Connah's Quay Nomads' Michael Wilde. Venables scored a goal every 116 minutes to guide Bala to third place in the division.	The Welsh Cup was cancelled for a second season due to COVID, while promotion and relegation was also put on hold. **The New Saints** and **Bala Town** qualified for the Conference League first qualifying round.

Glenn Moore

New queens of Europe

Barca ready to replace Lyon as continent's dominant side after Champions League win

Fran Kirby...the FWA Women's Footballer of the Year in action

A new era in women's club football was launched when Barcelona obliterated Chelsea to become the first Spanish side to win the Women's Champions League and the first club to win the competition in both genders. The Catalan giants scored three times in the opening 20 minutes of the Gothenburg final before settling for a 4-0 triumph that reverberated around the sport.

With both Lyon – champions for the previous five years – and their perennial rivals Wolfsburg knocked out in the quarter-finals, a new name was certain to be inscribed on the trophy. That it was one of football's most illustrious marques underlined the sport's new status.

Like many overnight successes this had been years in the making. Barcelona's women's team dates back to 1988 but was only fitfully supported and did not win the domestic title until 2012. That earned them a place in Europe only to be given a 7-0 aggregate schooling by Arsenal on debut.

With the game in Spain semi-pro at best, with long bus journeys to matches and training at 10pm, many of the better Spanish players – including Vicky Losada and Jenni Hermoso – went to the US, Sweden, Germany, France or England.

Some, however, stayed, like Alexia Putellas and Marta Torrejon, and pushed to raise standards. Six years ago Barcelona went full-time and in 2018 agreed their own shirt sponsorship with tool company Stanley. As the Spanish league improved Hermoso and Losada came home. A clutch of high quality foreign players were signed too, notably Lieke Martens, after being the star of Euro 2017, Caroline Graham Hansen, a two-time UWCL runner-up with Wolfsburg, and Kheira Hamraoui, twice a winner with Lyon.

In Europe they got closer, and after reaching a trio of quarter-finals and the last four in 2017 they made the final in 2019. Lyon blew them away with four goals in the opening half-hour.

The players' response was to ask coach Lluis Cortes to "work us harder". A lot of the extra application was physical; they felt Lyon had overpowered them. "That day we promised ourselves we would work a lot to be European champions," said Cortes.

It paid off. With seven of the XI that started in Budapest doing so in Sweden they "bullied" Chelsea, the WSL side's manager Emma Hayes admitted, as well as being superior technically.

There was also a mental aspect. Barca tore at Chelsea from the kick-off with Martens' shot against the bar after 30 seconds prompting a panicked response that ended with Fran Kirby's clearance looping into the Chelsea net off Melanie Leupolz's shins. Chelsea were shell-shocked and could have been three down before conceding a second in the 12th minute. That was a penalty converted by Putellas after Leupolz, attempting to block Hermoso's shot, unluckily tripped her.

When the third goal was tucked away by Aitana Bonmati, following a bewitching phase of swift passing, it was all over. Chelsea's makeshift full-backs had been exposed by a pair of world-class wingers who rammed home their dominance when one laid on the fourth goal for the other, Martens skipping down the left before setting up Graham Hansen.

> A new name was certain to be inscribed on the trophy. That it was one of football's most illustrious marques underlined the sport's new status

These individual mismatches were no surprise. More worrying for Hayes was how insecure and overwhelmed Chelsea were elsewhere. Her team did create chances, including at 1-0, but Pernille Harder, the sport's most expensive player, and Sam Kerr, its most lethal finisher, missed them.

Chelsea, having wrapped up a successful defence of the WSL title the previous weekend, two points ahead of Manchester City, will be back. The club remain firmly behind the team with owner Roman Abramovich flying to Sweden for the final and visiting the players in the dressing room afterwards. "All the girls were quick to tell him we'll be back here and working hard on the training pitch to make sure we do that," said Hayes.

The mountain, however, is going to get steeper. Next season a revamped UWCL begins emulating the men's competition with a group stage, centralised TV rights, and even its own anthem. There will also be more places – three initially – for clubs from the leading women's leagues. Among those making their debuts are Milan and, probably, Real Madrid.

Suddenly women's football is looking a lot like the men's when it comes to names on trophies. In Italy, Juventus secured their fourth *Scudetto* in four years' existence with their 20th victory in 20 league matches. They then looked to recruit outgoing Arsenal coach Joe Montemurro, a sure sign they want to up their game in Europe. In France and Germany, Paris Saint-Germain and

Victorious...Barcelona Femeni lift their first Champions League

Bayern Munich appear poised to overhaul Lyon and Wolfsburg. In England, Leicester City gained promotion to a WSL increasingly comprised of Premier League clubs.

Lyon, for so long supreme, will not follow Umea, FFC Frankfurt and Turbine Potsdam – all multiple European winners in the past, into obscurity. The commitment of president Jean-Michel Aulas is too great, but their quarter-final loss to PSG signalled the end of their hegemony. The US offshoot OL Reign appears to be absorbing increasing attention and a rebuilding effort is needed under new coach Sonia Bompastor. Aiding her will be the return from injury of Ada Hegerberg.

Barcelona will not be easy to dethrone. They went into the final having clinched the Spanish title with eight games to spare after 26 straight victories. The confidence and lustre gained from European success will lift them again. It has been a long haul to the summit; they aim to stay there.

Quick start...Barca celebrate their first-minute opening goal

Round-up

Celebrations... Northern Ireland

TOURNAMENT DEBUT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland beat Ukraine in the Euro 2022 qualifying play-offs to qualify for their first major tournament. Also gaining places for the finals, to be held in England, via the same route were Russia and Switzerland.

USA AND SWEDEN TO MEET AGAIN IN TOKYO

Favourites United States were grouped with Sweden, who famously knocked them out in the Rio 2016 quarter-finals, Australia and New Zealand in the Tokyo Olympics draw. Hosts Japan were paired with Great Britain, Chile and Canada while the remaining group features China, Brazil, Netherlands and Zambia. The tournament kicks off on July 21. A full preview of the tournament will be included in next month's *World Soccer*.

MANCHESTER UNITED MANAGER QUITS

Casey Stoney, who built the first professional Manchester United squad when the club re-formed its women's team then led them to immediate promotion and two top-four WSL finishes, has quit. Discontent over facilities is believed to be a factor in her decision. Stoney is expected to take up a job in NWSL next.

England legend...Fara Williams

FARA WILLIAMS RETIRES

England's record appearance maker, Fara Williams, retired after a 21-year career. Williams won 172 England caps and five for Team GB. She won two Women's Super League titles with Liverpool, the FA Cup with Everton and Arsenal, and also played for Chelsea, Charlton and Reading. She was homeless in the early part of her career, combining playing for England with living on the streets and in hostels.

DRAMATIC FINALE IN AUSTRALIA'S W-LEAGUE

Melbourne Victory won the W-League, defeating regular season winners Sydney FC in a dramatic climax to the Grand Final. Kyra Cooney-Cross' 120th-minute corner was turned into her own goal by the hitherto outstanding Sydney goalkeeper Jada Mathyssen-Whyman.

GOT GOT NEED

Greg Lansdowne explores the history of Panini sticker albums at the European Championship

Ask those of a certain age to come up with a favourite album from 1980 and there is a good chance that David Bowie's *Scary Monsters, Back in Black* by AC/DC, or Madness' *Absolutely* will be mentioned. Yet for those with an interest in football stickers, the answer would be quite different: Panini's *Europa 80*, the European Championship's first-ever sticker album.

The Modena-based collectables brand had been operating for 20 years previously, starting with releases entirely made up of cards in the early 1960s, before moving onto self-adhesive stickers around a decade later. Three World Cups and countless domestic albums around Europe had already been published, and the expansion of the Euros finals from four teams to eight allowed Panini to add to their portfolio.

Despite the increase in teams, there was still a comparatively small number of qualifiers to work with, necessitating a requirement to pad out the album with a number of special features – beginning with a nine-sticker map of Europe pinpointing the finalists.

SERGIO RAMOS
ESP
OLEG BLOCHIN
URS
GARETH BALE
WAL
SINCE 2006
KENNY DALGLISH
SCO
ITALIA
PAOLO MALDINI
Milano, 26.6.1968
▲. Milan
36, 0
THIBAUT COURTO
DANMARK
JOHN JENSEN
København, 3.5.1965
◆. Brøndby IF
40, 1
EURO 2000
DAVID BECKHAM
ENG
PAT JENNINGS
ANDREW ROBERTSON
SCO
SINCE 2014
1994
1,78 m
64 Kg

An historical double-page spread followed, with stickers depicting the winning team and a star player from each previous European Championship winner – Lev Yashin (or "Jascin", as the legendary goalkeeper's name was spelt in *Europa 80*) of USSR, Amancio of Spain, Luigi Riva of Italy, Franz Beckenbauer of West Germany and Ivo Viktor of Czechoslovakia were those feted with an individual sticker.

At the back of the album came 14 "Excluded Nations", in the form of a team group, badge and three leading players for each country – ensuring big names of the era such as Pat Jennings, Kenny Dalglish, Michel Platini, Hans Krankl and Oleg Blokhin (spelt "Blochin') all got their merited sticker.

Perhaps the most eye-catching element for collectors around Europe was the gold metallic foil badges with emblems of all the featured nations – AKA "shinies" – the first time these now-coveted stickers had appeared in a Panini tournament album.

Four years later came *Euro 84*. With no British qualifiers at the final tournament, the tournament received very little media coverage in the UK – including a distinct lack of promotion for that summer's sticker album, with very few copies located in newsagents up and down the British Isles.

Those who were lucky enough to get their hands on the album were able to get an early sighting of Danish players such as Michael Laudrup, Jesper Olsen and Preben Elkjaer Larsen – ahead of their seismic appearance at Mexico '86 – as well as to be reacquainted with some of the heroes and villains from the *Espana 82 World Cup* album. This was also a time with "Trainers" featured, giving fans the chance to marvel at the sartorial elegance of Yugoslavia's Todor Veselinovic and his dashing scarf. It proved to be the nation's high point at that particular tournament: the team lost all three games with a goal difference of minus-eight.

The *Euro 88* album was noted for its brim-full of shiny gold images of Berni, the rabbit mascot used for the West German-hosted tournament, and the very short-lived experiment of a page dedicated to the referees. Now, it was all or nothing for Panini: "Excluded" teams were now left out entirely, meaning that the eight participants each had their three pages augmented by a four-sticker team group photo.

It was also the tournament that saw Dutch defender Sjaak Troost written into Panini folklore. Although he made the Netherlands squad, and had a place reserved for him in the Panini album, he remained an unknown quantity to most collectors. Why? Because the face on his sticker wasn't his, but that of Michel van de Korput, a player who hadn't featured at international level since 1981. A replacement was printed to right the wrong, but was only available in his local territory – and now fetches increasingly vast amounts on the secondary market.

A further case of mistaken identity occurred in Panini's *Euro 92* album, when defender Gordan Petric guested on the sticker purporting to be Slavisa Jokanovic. Of course, as it turned out, none of the Yugoslavian players were

Referees...the *Euro 88* feature was short-lived

Stylish...Yugoslavia coach Todor Veselinovic

Misprint...the incorrect version of Sjaak Troost's *Euro 88* sticker

Underdogs... Denmark's *Euro 92* page

Unlicensed...England's *Euro 2000* squad image

sighted in Sweden as they were barred from participating by the United Nations, who imposed heavy sanctions against the war-torn country. As the banishment was only confirmed a fortnight before the tournament, there was no time for a hasty album rejig – it had already been in the shops for several weeks by then. However, Yugoslavia's removal did not come as a huge surprise, resulting in Denmark also looming large in the Panini album – having finished as runners-up in qualifying Group 4.

Italy were also featured in the album, in spite of their failure to quality. This was due to doubts over Group 3 winners Soviet Union being able to play in the finals. Despite the Soviet dissolution at the end of 1991, a collection of their former republics merged to compete as the short-lived CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States).

The 1990s represented Panini's first difficult period of their illustrious history. Not only were they unable to secure the rights to the English Premier League collectables licence, but they also lost out to Merlin in the battle to publish the official Euro '96 sticker album.

They did, however, hold the rights to all 16 qualifiers, so many considered the *England '96* album the must-have release for the event. The tournament was ultimately the last competition for which Panini held the licence for an England national side until *Euro 2016* – a lengthy period of England players appearing in plain white shirts on Panini stickers.

Having missed out on the *France 98* album, *Euro 2000* is noteworthy for David Beckham's first appearance in a Panini tournament release. Cristiano Ronaldo made his Panini debut four years later for the finals held in his homeland. With the "rookie" phenomenon sweeping the European collectables market, that sticker now commonly fetches three figures.

The modern, nostalgia-fuelled enthusiasm for Panini stickers began with the *Germany 2006* album ahead of that year's World Cup. Thanks to the tournament being hosted in a country in thrall to football and collectables, lapsed sticker enthusiasts returned to the fold after many years away. The upturn in interest and sales has continued ever since.

> Cristiano Ronaldo made his Panini debut [at Euro 2004]...that sticker now commonly fetches three figures

Collector's item...Cristiano Ronaldo's *Euro 2004* sticker

Delayed...the *Euro 2020* album

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, Panini's *Euro 2020* album was put back a year, with a *Preview* album filling the gap last year.

That represents Panini's 11th successive European Championship tournament album – a fine chronicle of the winners, losers and all those in between from the Italian-hosted *Europa 80* to the multi-country, and delayed, *Euro 2020*.

May collectors continue to be hooked on Panini's classics for decades to come.

Greg Lansdowne is the author of *Stuck On You: The Rise & Fall...& Rise of Panini Stickers*

UNTOUCHABLE

21 years ago, Zinedine Zidane inspired France to European Championship glory. Ryan Baldi takes a look back at Zizou's finest hour

Zinedine Zidane is a difficult man to impress.

For his glittering 17-year playing career, the former Real Madrid coach is remembered as one of the finest midfielders in football history. A majestic technician, his central role in title wins in Italy and Spain, as well as Champions League and World Cup triumphs, saw him named FIFA World Player of the Year three times.

And he was the ultimate big-game player: a scorer of three World Cup final goals and, thanks to his spectacular volley against Bayer Leverkusen in 2002, architect of arguably the greatest ever goal scored in a European final.

Yet when Zidane's multitude of gifts coalesced sublimely in the summer of 2000 for the most exceptional tournament performance of his gilded career – and, it could be argued, the best any player had produced since Diego Maradona at the 1986 World Cup – the Frenchman's standards were so high that his self-appraisal amounted to little more than a Gallic shrug.

"At Euro 2000 I played well," he told *The Independent* in 2004, "but not brilliantly. I did not always shine."

Such an assessment might have been fair of Zidane's role in France's 1998 World Cup win on home soil when, despite scoring twice in the final, a group-stage red card and subsequent two-match suspension blighted a campaign in which he seldom delivered to his full potential. And to say he had not shone at his previous international tournament, Euro '96, would be an understatement: a pre-competition car accident affected his fitness and he fell desperately short of the building hype.

At Euro 2000, though, Zidane was nothing short of brilliant. No one – other than the man himself, it would seem – could claim he did not shine.

Circumstances aligned perfectly for Zidane ahead of the tournament to be hosted jointly by the Netherlands and Belgium. At the World Cup two years earlier, France rode to victory on the strength of their solidity. Famously, they were victorious in spite of the fact their main striker, Stephane Guivarc'h, failed to score (just as they would be 20 years later with Olivier Giroud in attack). But in the intervening period, France's dearth of attacking talent had transformed into their greatest asset. At Euro 2000, Zidane's creativity in the No.10 role would benefit from the pace and movement of four rapid and clinical strikers: Nicolas Anelka, Sylvain Wiltord, David Trezeguet and, primarily, Thierry Henry, whose transformation from rapid winger to deadly centre-forward was complete.

"We're definitely better than two years ago," Zidane said before the tournament. "Everyone is two years older and has more experience, and we play in the best European divisions. We now have five attackers with immense quality, which we lacked at the World Cup.

"As for me, at 28 I've matured and reached the summit of my art."

10
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Spain clash... Pep Guardiola attempts to keep up with Zidane

The draw for the group stage might have concerned many with a vested interest in France's hopes of pairing the Jules Rimet and Henri Delaunay trophies, with *Les Bleus* pitted against Denmark, Czech Republic and the co-hosts Netherlands. But for a player who thrived in high-stakes games, it set the table perfectly.

"We actually tried to lock him in the locker room so he couldn't play," former Denmark full-back Soren Colding jokes of his sides plans to cope with Zidane in their group-stage opener.

The Danes started brightly, with Jon Dahl Tomasson and Ebbe Sand both wasting good opportunities. Then France – and Zidane – took over.

Denmark...Allan Nielsen tussles with Zidane for the ball

"When you got close to him and if you were lucky enough to get the ball, then it was a free-kick," ex-Tottenham midfielder Allan Nielsen remembers of his frustration at Zidane's immaculate close control. "It was nearly impossible. He was so good at protecting the ball, turning, twisting and releasing the ball at the right time."

"He was impossible to get the ball

Golden generation...France during Euro 2000

off," adds Morten Bisgaard, another of Denmark's midfielders that day. "You knew you just had to cover the areas the best you can, to get support from other players and keep the space tight, be compact and hope that he doesn't do anything special in the game. He was a fantastic player at that point. He had a good game. He was unstoppable."

France won 3-0. Zidane laid on the second goal for Thierry Henry, a lofted pass that released the striker near the halfway line to race clear and slide the ball past Peter Schmeichel. Curiously, it was the first of only two goals Zidane would ever assist for Henry.

Zidane then masterfully created a chance for Wiltord, plucking the ball from the sky and performing a stepover while simultaneously playing a pass into the forward's path, only for Schmeichel to smother the resultant shot. France's No.10 had a hand in the third goal too, his subtle body feint in the centre circle creating enough space for him to prod the ball into Henry, springing a move that ended in a simple finish for Wiltord.

"He was a world-class player," reflects Nielsen. "At that time, at his peak, he was unbelievable. There was not much you could do."

In France's second game, Czech defender Petr Gabriel dealt a sledge-hammer blow to his side's chances when his poor back-pass was seized upon by Henry, who poked the ball past Pavel Srnicek for a seventh-minute lead. Nonchalantly pirouetting and passing his way through a 2-1 victory, Zidane helped seal France's progress to the knockout stages with a game to spare and so was rested for the 3-2 defeat to Netherlands in the last group fixture.

If Zidane had impressed in the group games, he would awe in the knockouts.

In a tight encounter against a talented Spain side that many had tipped to finally end their long wait for international success, Zidane opened the scoring. His 25-yard free-kick found the top corner with such power and curl that goalkeeper Santiago Canizares' dive was futile from the moment of launch. And while Spain wasted chances late on – not least Raul's sky-bound penalty kick – France's margin of victory could have been greater than their eventual 2-1 win had Patrick Vieira converted the chance Zidane conjured for him, or had Zidane himself not uncharacteristically miscued when Christophe Dugarry located him eight yards from goal in the first half.

Then came Zidane's tour de force, his *pièce de résistance;* quite possibly the finest performance he ever produced.

"We knew France very well and we knew they were one of the favourites to win the Euros," former Benfica striker Nuno Gomes remembers of the build-up to the semi-final between Portugal and France. "We prepared for the game with a lot of concentration and we watched some of the games that they had played before.

"Zidane was the most dangerous player and he was the one responsible for the offensive game, so we paid special attention to him. He was the player who imposed the pace of play for the French team. We knew that we had to try to stop him and not let him be comfortable with the ball."

But Zidane's level of comfort within the game was evident by just the ninth minute, when his casual back-flick rolled perfectly into the path of on-rushing left-back Bixente Lizarazu. He was in peak from, in flawless sync with his ten French colleagues. Later in the half, a neatly executed stepover took him away from Costinha. After a one-two with Henry on the edge of the box, he found Lilian Thuram in space out wide.

> "We actually tried to lock him in the locker room so he couldn't play"
>
> Soren Colding, Denmark full-back

Match-winner... Zidane scores his decisive penalty against Portugal

Scorer...Nuno Gomes nets for Portugal in the semi-final

He finished the period with a rasping long-range shot that whistled inches over the top corner of Vitor Baia's goal. France were 1-0 down at the break thanks to Gomes' instinctive 20-yard snapshot, but Zidane was summoning his vast powers to conjure a comeback.

After Henry had equalised, Zidane almost broke the Portuguese resistance in the 71st minute. He controlled a high ball into the area on his chest and, in one movement, changed direction and whipped a left-footed cross that evaded Anelka's dive by a hair.

Every time Zidane touched the ball, he attracted one, two, sometimes three opponents. His sheer gravity was drawing Portugal out of their shape and creating space for colleagues. Invariably, he'd swivel away from pressure and find a team-mate. On several such occasions, he'd then employ a quick give-and-go, getting the ball back ten yards closer to goal and repeating the trick.

Into extra-time, Zidane renewed Costinha's torment. Much as the Danes had found, the Portuguese midfielders learned they could only halt Zidane by illegal means. A lung-busting run saw Zidane carry the ball from deep inside his own half, leaving three defenders in his wake as he bounded toward the Portuguese penalty area – they couldn't get close enough even to foul him. Such a display of grace, power and stamina would have provided a fitting finale to a game Zidane had illuminated, but his final pass was blocked.

Then, in the 117th minute, his moment arrived.

Austrian referee Gunter Benko awarded France a penalty after Portugal full-back Abel Xavier blocked Wiltord's goal-bound shot with his arm. Staving off the exhaustion of nearly two hours' creative toil, Zidane steadied himself for his first-ever international spot kick. He rifled the ball beyond Vitor Baia and into the top-left corner. With the Golden Goal rule in effect, the game was over. Zidane had crowned his faultless display by firing France into the final. "He's playing football from another planet," said Thuram after the game.

"It was very tough, very intense," remembers Robert Pires, who came on as a second-half substitute against Portugal. "There was a lot of stress because it was just one step from the final. But it was the best game Zizou played. He was like a genius, like a maestro. He took a lot of responsibility. For the other players like me, it was easy to follow him in this game."

"He changed the game," Nuno Gomes reflects, 21 years on. "There was a move where he took the ball almost from one area to the other. And, of course, the way he scored the penalty.

"He's for sure among one of the best players I faced. And for me, he's one of the best players in the world. Some of the times I played against him I found myself amazed by his pure class."

Against a strong Italy side in the final four days later, a 93rd-minute Wiltord strike was required to again force extra-time, before Trezeguet's thudding left-footed finish from a Pires cutback gifted France another Golden Goal victory and the trophy. Compared to

his semi-final performance, Zidane was more subdued, yet still the presentable chances he created for Thuram, Wiltord and Henry could have made for a more comfortable evening's work for France had they not been squandered.

Zidane, predictably, was named Player of the Tournament. Later that year, he collected his second FIFA World Player of the Year award, and the following summer joined Real Madrid from Juventus for a world-record fee. He had, indeed, reached the summit of his art.

"When we didn't know what to do with the ball," said Lizarazu of Zidane at Euro 2000, "we gave it to him."

In 2004, ever unimpressed by his own magnificence, Zidane lamented the fact that his international career had lacked a dominant performance at a major tournament. He hadn't stamped his mark on a World Cup the way Pele had in 1970 or Maradona in 1986 – so he felt – nor at the Euros like Michel Platini in 1984 or Marco van Basten four years later.

Yet anyone who witnessed his performances in Netherlands and Belgium during that summer would disagree – from the global TV audiences, to the fans in the stands, to those who stood alongside him.

"Zidane dazzled the European Championship with his quality," said team-mate Emmanuel Petit.

"On the field, he was amazing," concludes Pires. "When we talk in France about this tournament, all the people say Zizou was the best player.

"Deschamps was the captain, but Zizou was the leader with his technique. He was *the* player."

Challenge...Italy's Fabio Cannavaro tries to tackle Zidane in the final

> "When we didn't know what to do with the ball, we gave it to him"
>
> Bixente Lizarazu, France left-back

Winners...Zidane celebrates winning the final with (L-R) Didier Deschamps, Marcel Desailly and Bixente Lizarazu

PHIL FODEN

"We are a young team and nothing fazes us"

The England and Manchester City wonderkid sits down to discuss his exciting rise over the last year and his future Three Lions aspirations…

Many of your team-mates, including Kyle Walker, have said you are the best young player they've ever seen. What is it like to hear compliments like that?
It puts a smile on my face – as you can see! I'm just happy that he's said that really. He's worked with some great players, so for him to say that is a big statement. I know I still have a lot to work on and improve so for him to say makes me happy, but I still know what I need to do to get better.

Pep Guardiola has been rotating you since you broke through, whilst praising your development and performances. What has he said to you about your progress?
He doesn't really speak about things like that to me, he speaks to the coaching staff. He just wants to see a good attitude every day and wants to see that you are training well. I go to training every day and give 100 per cent and that's where you can't go wrong really. If I don't get in the team, I know I've put 100 per cent in and I know that if I have got in the team I know that I've earned it.

How much confidence have you taken from the belief that Pep has shown in you this season?
I've played in some massive games this year, like cup finals and big Champions League games, and they are the games that everyone wants to play in. Sometimes it's difficult for a young player to play in those games, but I think he's been patient with me and played me at the right times. Now I'm learning a lot and feel ready to go and play whenever.

Can you summarise the battles you've had to go through to get to this point?
When I was younger, in the academy, I was a lot smaller than the other players, so I had to use my brain more to compete. Eventually I started growing and when I made the step up to the first team it was such a big step up from the youth team. I've definitely had to adapt quickly.

And now? How have you worked to ensure that you are able to compete with the senior players?
I've tried to get in the gym much more now and tried to get much bigger and stronger. I would probably say the biggest challenge was going into the first team and trying to adapt to the physical side. That was the most challenging thing for me.

You've played in several positions. Which is your favourite?
My favourite position is in the centre of midfield – that's where I see myself as a player. But I've enjoyed playing off the left and off the right and sometimes as a false nine and scoring goals as well. I feel like I'm a flexible player, so I've been enjoying no matter where I play, and knowing that I can do a job there.

Is there a player that you watched a lot and partly modelled your game on?
That was probably David Silva. I liked him ever since he first came to the club. I got to watch him live in training, which isn't bad, so that's probably the player I looked up to the most and tried to learn from. I'm just sad that he's gone now, but hopefully he will be back as a coach or something else one day.

What did you learn from David Silva playing with him every day?
Just what he sees. He sees the game so differently to other players and how he moves into space in tight areas, how he receives the ball and never loses it. All of these things – I've been able to learn so much from him.

When he left, did you see that as an opportunity for you? Has that inspired your development this season?
Yeah, I suppose so, but there are a lot of midfielders at the club still and there's a lot of quality in the team, so David leaving wasn't just going to give me that position. At Man. City everyone needs to train well and play well to play. It depends on me – if I'm playing well enough I will get the shirt. It's down to me.

The more you play, the more your opponents will learn about you. How do you deal with that?
I'm obviously still quite young, but if I feel like a player is reading me I'm going to try to adapt and change my game. I feel like I'm really good at that – at adapting my game style. Like I said before I can play many positions, so that helps. It's not something I fear and I look forward to the challenge if that's going to happen to me. ➤

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Graceful...Foden brings the ball down in England's victory over San Marino at Wembley

Mentor...David Silva has been a big influence on Foden's career

Specifically which parts of your game are you really working on to improve?
All of the game, to be honest. Probably defending off the ball, learning new positions – I've played a lot of new positions this year, so I just need to play more positions and learn them. I feel like I need to improve the whole of my game.

Burnout is a concern this season with the intensity of the schedule. How are you feeling in terms of freshness?
Maybe that's a concern for some teams that don't have a lot of players to change in and out, but at Manchester City we have a lot of players that the manager can change, so I feel like everyone should be okay. We also have a lot of backroom staff who work hard on things like that – who judge minutes played and watch how people are performing, so I think we should be okay.

Let's talk England. There were calls for you to be called up for months before you eventually did...
I'm only 21 years old. A lot of people had been pushing for me to be playing for the senior team much earlier, but I hadn't played a lot of games at Manchester City. Recently I've been playing a lot more and doing well though. I've had to work really hard for the opportunity, but now I've got it I'm just trying to give it the best I can, and just enjoy it.

As a youngster, did you always dream of becoming an England star?
When I was young, every kid on the estate used

Next generation... Foden and Sancho are one of several exciting English talents

"My favourite position is in the centre of midfield – that's where I see myself as a player. But I feel like I'm a flexible player"

to dream of playing for England. We all pretended that we were players and that was something I used to do. Now I'm in the senior team it seems crazy! It's still not really sunk in. But now I'm here as an England player I'm going to enjoy it.

You've been billed as someone different – a unique English midfielder. How do you deal with that kind of pressure?
I try not to read too much into it, you know. I'm just trying to keep doing what I do and trying to play my football. If people like that they like it, if they don't they don't. I just try to come into the team and do what I do at the club and play my football.

You've been likened to players like Paul Gascoigne. Do you have an idea of what he was like, or is that way too far back?
Sometimes I watch old players. Paul Gascoigne was obviously one of the best England players to have ever played the game. I feel if those players had the right coaches around them at the time, and if they played the right football, they would have won more trophies. But I feel like we are going in the right direction now in terms of playing the right football and playing the right way.

There are several exciting young players around at the moment with the likes of yourself, Jadon Sancho, Kylian Mbappe and Erling Haaland. Which young player has impressed you the most?
I watched Jadon when he went to Dortmund. To do what he did at such a young age was impressive. There's not many players who could have played at that high a level and performed so well, so yeah I definitely looked at what he was doing and was very impressed.

And how do you feel about the strength of this young group that's breaking through for England?
There are a lot of young players now playing at a high level and it seems like every year younger players are playing more big games. It just shows that the academies have got great coaches who are teaching them the right things and helping them to go on to play in the first team.

How do you feel about the competition in and around the England team with Grealish, Mount, Maddison, Rashford, Saka, Sancho all fighting for places?
Everyone wants this shirt in this England team. There are a lot of good players who haven't been picked, but maybe they will be picked next time. It just shows that everyone is fighting for a place and it's healthy competition. That can only make England better. Everyone is fighting for the place and I think that can only be a good thing for England.

You're already at a club that's challenging for and winning a lot of big trophies. What do you believe is possible with England? Can you help them break their duck?
I want to try to keep this shirt and play for England for many years. I feel like, as a team, we can go much further than what we have done in the past. I feel really confident with the way we are going and with the players we've got. The big thing is we need to start winning tournaments and I'm hoping in the future we can start doing that.

Do any of England's past failures weigh you down or act as pressure?
No, we are a young team and nothing fazes us. We just go out and play our football, and I think that's a good thing because we don't think too much. We can also start controlling games now because we've got the players for that. I'm just really confident for the future and it's going to be good to see what England can do.

You've spoken about winning something with England – is that easier for you to visualise because you won the Under-17 World Cup in 2017? What memories do you have of that tournament?
If you win youth tournaments it can give you the experience to go on and win one with the first team. I feel like the World Cup definitely helped me to play on a big stage and not feel the pressure as much. I've played in many big games at Man. City now and I've learned to cope with the fans and the pressure. I feel like it definitely helps you. It's definitely easier to visualise winning with the senior team because I've won something at youth level.

Where do you keep your Under-17 World Cup winners' medal?
It's in my trophy cabinet at my parents' house and I go there a lot. Sometimes I walk past and just look at all of the trophies I've won and medals and just look through them. It's nice to go back and see what I've won sometimes. The World Cup medal is probably my most cherished medal.

Interview by Matt Read

Flexible...Foden has excelled in a variety of positions for City this season

LUIS SUAREZ

"In football it is very rare for something to be forever"

Before sealing the La Liga title in his first season at Atletico Madrid, Luis Suarez sat down with *World Soccer* to discuss his career…

It's 15 years since you left Nacional in Uruguay to begin your career in Europe. How do you reflect on that time?
If anybody looks at 15 years of their life I am sure it is easy to find some small regrets. But I have played for some of the biggest teams in Europe, played with many of the best players ever, and won the top trophies. That was always the ambition so I can have no regrets.

When you left Barcelona last year it was suggested that you didn't want to leave Spain. Do you feel more comfortable living in Spain than in Netherlands or England?
I enjoy living in Spain. I enjoyed Liverpool, but I knew it was always the desire of my family to live in Spain. Joining Barcelona was a professional decision but also a personal one as well. It was what my family wanted.

How different do you think your career might have been if you had won the Premier League title with Liverpool in 2013-14? Could that have delayed your move to Barcelona, for example?
Looking back it is always hard to say. It would have been special to win the league with Liverpool, but I am glad that their wait is now over. They look like a team that will compete for many seasons to come even if this one has not been the best for them. They are back where they belong.

One player who starred alongside you in that Liverpool team was Raheem Sterling. What have you made of his improvement since then? Do you consider him among the best players in the world?
There have been big changes with Raheem since I played with him at Liverpool. He always had talent but that did not always translate to goals. Now he's one of the most prolific scorers – not just in England but in Europe. I am so pleased how things have worked out for him.

Would you like to see him play in Spain? How do you think he would perform outside the Premier League?
I don't think Manchester City would like him to play in Spain – I don't think they would want him to play anywhere but Manchester. He would score many goals in Spain – he would score goals anywhere.

Your partnership with Lionel Messi and Neymar was extraordinary. Do you miss playing with them? Will we ever see as a good a trio ever again?
It was exciting playing with Messi and Neymar. Messi is the best in history and Neymar is one of the best in the world. We had an equally good relationship off the pitch and that really helped with our performances on it.

When did you learn that Neymar would join Paris Saint-Germain? How did you feel?
In football it is very rare now for something to be forever. He is a friend and nobody wanted him to leave, but players move on and that is something you just have to accept.

Tell us about your relationship with Leo Messi. Is your connection off the field still as strong as it was on it?
On the pitch he is Messi, the best player there has ever been, but off the pitch he is Leo who is my friend. From the first training session, we had a good connection and our friendship has grown over the years. We no longer play for the same team, but we are still great friends – it is a friendship that goes beyond football.

How strange was it to play against each other over the past season?
It was maybe a little strange but, as I say, in football very few things are forever. Players move on, but good friendships stay forever.

Do you still have regrets at how you left Barcelona last summer?
I don't understand everything. I said at the time that I did not understand the decision, but I have moved on now. It has been a good season with Atletico!

Before moving to Atletico Madrid, did you have other options? How close were you to joining Juventus?
There were options and other options that I looked at. When I think how well I have settled in at Atletico and the faith the coach has shown in me, it was easily the right decision for me.

Was there any interest from the Premier League? Is that something you would have considered?
Playing for any team other than Liverpool in England would be hard. I had, and hope I still do have, such a good relationship with the Liverpool fans that it would be strange for me to play for somebody else.

You and Diego Simeone seem like a good match for each other. What has it been like to work with him as a manager? How does he compare with some of the other managers that you've played for?
He is a coach who reaches out a lot to you, who motivates you, who makes it very clear that he has faith in you. I have a lot of respect for all the faith he has shown in me, and I hope this season I have repaid all that faith.

You scored 12 goals in your first 15 La Liga games, the best start for a player at a new club in the league since Cristiano Ronaldo joined Real Madrid. Why did everything click for you so quickly?
It was a league I was used to and I think that helps. There was no real adjustment period. The coach, who had a lot of belief in me, and the quality of my team-mates make playing in this team so easy.

You signed a two-year contract at Atletico. Having had such a successful season, do you think you could stay even longer? Or will you want to try a new league?
At the moment I am enjoying my time here. We are showing what we are capable of and my team-mates have made me very welcome. I enjoy it here, we are settled in Spain – there is no need to think about me leaving.

You have often been linked with a transfer to MLS, maybe at David Beckham's Inter Miami, for example. Is that something you would like to explore one day?
The MLS is an attractive place to be. The league is getting stronger season after season and it would be interesting to live in the United States. I can see why it is an attractive option for many players.

Or perhaps a move to play for your old team-mate, Steven Gerrard?
I think Stevie is doing just fine without me! I am pleased but not at all surprised to see him win the league with Rangers. Winning is what he does and at some point in the future I am sure he will be at Liverpool again.

Interview by Donald Deane

"The result could have been different that night if I had been playing"

Ahead of the 2021 Copa America, Brazil's talisman reflects on his international career so far…

Even before you made your Brazil debut, people were talking about you playing for *Selecao* – Pele backed you to make the 2010 World Cup squad and 14,000 Brazilians signed a petition for you to be included! Did you feel you were ready for that tournament? Was it a shock to be left out?
You always want to play in a World Cup, but 2010 was not my time. I accepted the decision of Dunga – it was not my time and maybe he was right. In 2014 I was a lot more mature, I was more ready and I had been working hard. I accepted the decision at the time and, looking back, I would say that I understand it.

Brazil went out in the quarter-finals to Netherlands in 2010 – do you think you would have made a difference if you'd have been playing?
Always I think I have the ability to make a difference if I am playing, but it is impossible to say if the result would be any different. I remember that game we had players like Kaka and Robinho playing who had so much quality, so it is important to be respectful to them.

A couple of years later you went to London for the 2012 Olympics. What are your memories of that competition? Did you feel that you should have won the gold medal?
The atmosphere around London was a very special one and I will always feel privileged that I was able to be involved. The final against Mexico was of course disappointing, but I will always remember that competition.

There was some shock, but Mexico were the better team in the final so I can't say we should have won the gold medal. It is never good to lose a final, but you have to give credit where it is due and Mexico deserved a lot of credit after that final.

Next came the 2013 Confederations Cup, when Brazil won the tournament and you won the Golden Ball. Was that a big achievement for you and the team, or was it purely preparation for the World Cup?
It was an important win for us. Personally, I felt like there was a lot of pressure on myself to perform well in a Brazil jersey, and that tournament I felt that I could show the supporters what I was capable of.

It was during that tournament that you first wore the No.10 shirt. Can you explain how important that is in Brazil? Did that feel like a big moment in your career?
I never planned to wear the No.10 – that was never in my mind. I always said that I wanted to wear No.7 or No.11. It was Dani Alves who looked at me and said: "You are a No.10, you must wear it." I am glad that I listened to him, and of course it's a number some of our greatest ever players have worn.

The 2014 World Cup should have been the highlight of your career, but it ended in heartbreak – you got injured and Brazil lost 7-1 to Germany in the semi-final. Have you and the team recovered from that, or is it still painful?
I think that the result could have been different that night if I had been playing. I don't think we would see the same score. Destiny decided that it was not to be that night – and even though it is not a good day in our history, we have moved on. Every major international competition is a chance to put right and wash clean previous results and success at a World Cup is still a big dream for me.

You were made captain in 2015 ahead of the Copa America. How did it feel to lead out your country for the first time?
I am happy just to play but, of course, when you are asked to captain your country there is a very special feeling. You don't have to wear an armband to be a captain – there are many captains in the team. If I am asked to be captain or not I will always try to lead and help the team.

The 2016 Olympics was Brazil's first-ever gold medal in men's football – and you scored the winning penalty in the final. Were you nervous before taking the penalty?
Still now I can remember the walk to the ➤

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penalty spot – it was the most nervous moment of my career. Thankfully God gave me the capacity to remain calm and focused and I was able to score it.

Did beating Germany help to heal some of the scars from 2014, especially as the final of the Olympics was in Rio?
If we are honest, I think the game against Germany at the World Cup was in our minds – I know it was in mine. We didn't talk so much about it, but I am sure we were all thinking about it. It wasn't about revenge, but I think the victory helped wash some of the memories of 2014 away, and to win our first gold medal in Brazil was, of course, very special.

At the 2018 World Cup, your PSG team-mate Kylian Mbappe was the star of the final, becoming the youngest player to score in a World Cup final since Pele. Where does he rank among the players you've played with?
He is one of the best – and at his age he can get even better. He has already won the World Cup and has had plenty of success with PSG. I think in ten years he will be one of the most successful players of all time.

We have a good relationship on and off the field, so I like to see him do well. I was not surprised by what I saw him do in the final, but I think it was a moment where the rest of the world also recognised him as one of the best players in the world.

Brazil hosted and won the 2019 Copa America. How did it feel to watch those celebrations after missing the tournament through injury?
I was happy to see Brazil and my team-mates win – of course that made me very happy to see. At the same time, of course, you wish you were there and were part of it. That is only natural.

Does that disappointment make you even more determined to win the 2021 Copa America?
I would be determined anyway. When you play for Brazil, you know that the expectation is to win every major tournament that you are in – that is the only way.

Record-chasing...Neymar moved ahead of Ronaldo by scoring a hat-trick against Peru in October

"Still now I can remember the walk to the penalty spot – it was the most nervous moment of my career"

Are you confident Brazil can go all the way again at this summer's tournament?
We believe in every competition. That is the way of Brazil; the confidence and belief is always there that we can win. It is not going to be easy though. It's never easy – everybody wants to beat Brazil.

Congratulations on becoming Brazil's second all-time top scorer. Has it always been a target to score that many goals? And do you believe that you can beat Pele's record?
It is always a target to score goals – not for records, but to help the team. To go above Ronaldo in goals for Brazil was humbling. He is one of the best players ever. At his peak he was a phenomenon that could not be stopped. To win two World Cups and score so many important goals, he will go down in the history of our greatest players.

You've overtaken many great Brazilians that you grew up watching – Ronaldo, Romario, Rivaldo, Ronaldinho, Robinho... which of them had the greatest influence on you?
All of those players have a big place in the history of the national team and are all players that I look up to and have enjoyed watching.

For me growing up though, it was always Robinho that I was trying to emulate. He was my idol. Watching him made me a better player – and then to get an opportunity to play with him for Santos and Brazil was a big dream for me.

What would it mean to you to one day overtake Pele?
I am not even thinking about that. All I am focused on is winning games, helping the team, and if that means scoring goals and breaking records then I will be happy. But nobody compares to Pele.

Do you think anyone will ever replicate what he did in winning three World Cups? In your opinion, is he the greatest footballer of all time?

Missing...Brazil missed Neymar in their 7-1 thrashing by Germany in 2014

Olympic champion...Neymar with his gold medal in 2016

He is the king – nobody can be compared to the king. You can never say never, but even playing for Brazil it is unlikely anybody will ever win three World Cups in their career again. For me the dream is to win one. To win a World Cup with Brazil is my biggest dream.

Finally, tell us about some of your current Brazil team-mates. Firstly, Dani Alves: still going strong at the age of 38! How good is it to have a player like that in the group?
He has so much experience and that will always help to have such a player in the group. He is one of the most successful players of our generation – he has been successful and won trophies whatever country he has played in and he is still a very important player for us.

You've played with Philippe Coutinho for many years – he recently told us that he's sure you will overtake Pele's record. How much do you enjoy playing with him, and would you like to play together for the same club one day?
I have known him since we were children – he is a special friend and a special player. For me to play with him is a big pleasure because he sees the game in a way that so few players see it. I enjoy playing with him and I can't decide his future for him, but of course it would be a pleasure to play with him.

Vinicius Jr. and Rodrygo of Real Madrid are both still only 20 years old, but they have been compared to you – how highly do you rate them?
They are both top players and they have shown their quality with Real. I hope they are enjoying the experience playing in Europe, but in Brazil people can be in a bit of a hurry. They are young and they need time to hit the top level, but once they are there I think they will stay there for a very long time.

Interview by Donald Deane

Heartbreak...Neymar missed the last Copa America on home soil due to an ankle ligament injury

Idol...Neymar and Robinho

WORDS: Tim Vickery

[ONES TO WATCH]

MARQUINHOS

Brazil peaked too soon in the build-up to the last World Cup. Flying throughout 2016 and 2017, they were not quite the same by the time they reached Russia. Striker Gabriel Jesus lost form and key midfielder Renato Augusto struggled for fitness – but one problem was entirely self-inflicted.

During the qualifiers, Marquinhos formed an excellent partnership with the rugged Miranda. In ten games together, Brazil conceded just two goals. But, by the main event, coach Tite was unable to resist Thiago Silva's claims. Marquinhos was dropped – his only participation in Russia was as a late substitute in the second round match against Mexico. In the fatal quarter-final against Belgium, Brazil paid the price for pairing two veterans in defence, and badly missed their quickest centre-back. Having narrowly missed out on the squad in 2014, it was a second World Cup disappointment for Marquinhos.

Part of the problem, perhaps, is that Marquinhos is so easy to overlook. He is almost too impressive for his own good. Fast, calm and skilful, he makes things look easy. And Paris Saint-Germain can be an especially strange destination for a defender, with only a few chances to shine per season. It may also not help his cause that he played so little club football in Brazil, leaving Corinthians after a handful of games to join Roma, before making his way to Paris.

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW

- Marquinhos came close to representing Portugal, saying he would be "honoured" to play for them just before receiving his first Brazil call-up in 2013.
- He only missed seven minutes of Brazil's victorious 2016 Olympic campaign.
- His PSG team-mates call him "Kaiser Franz", according to Thomas Tuchel.

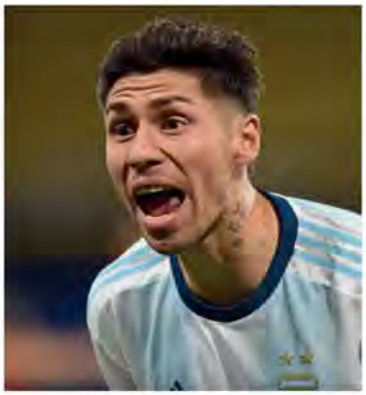
It is, though, hard to imagine Brazil overlooking Marquinhos again. He was straight back into the side after the World Cup, and was a key part of a defensive unit that conceded just one goal – and that a very harsh penalty – on the way to winning the 2019 Copa America on home soil. Since Russia, the centre-back partnership has been Marquinhos plus one – and if Thiago Silva does not last all the way to Qatar, the recent form of Eder Militao at Real Madrid is encouraging.

The PSG defender would also seem to be the long-term solution to a minor headache that has been bugging Brazil for a while. Thiago Silva proved a disastrous captain in 2014. Neymar was then given the role before deciding he would prefer not to have it. Tite then went with the idea of a revolving captain before settling on Dani Alves, who was promptly forced out of Russia 2018 through injury. Alves still hopes to make it to Qatar, but the long-term bet is surely Marquinhos, who captains Neymar at club level. Brazil often love a ranter and a raver with the armband, but there are surely merits in going with the sense of calm and competence radiating from their outstanding centre-back.

Aged 26, Marquinhos has quietly already accumulated over 50 caps. But the best part of the story may be yet to come.

Gonzalo MONTIEL

In the 2019 Copa, Argentina ended up playing Juan Foyth as a defensive right-back. Now, with a better balance in the side, coach Lionel Scaloni has gone with a River Plate stalwart, who may soon be on the move. Quick and intelligent, 24-year-old Montiel supplies attacking options down the right flank, and has been linked with the likes of Lyon and West Ham United.



Erwin SAAVEDRA

In 2019, Saavedra was one of the stars of the Bolivar side that marched to the Apertura title, yet he failed to make an impression at that year's Copa America. Then-Bolivia coach Eduardo Villegas cited the right-sided midfielder as an example of a player who could tip the balance in domestic football, but struggled with the demands at a higher level. Two years on, it will be interesting to see how he has developed.

Carlos PALACIOS

Chile are in desperate need of young talent, and there are high hopes for this support striker. Strong, full of promising swagger and able to operate all across the attacking line, Palacios doesn't turn 21 until after the tournament. In March he joined Brazilian side Internacional on loan from parent club Union Espanola, and there are fears that the move could limit his first-team chances and stall his development.

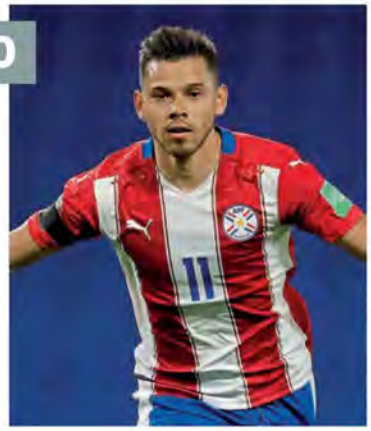
Carlos CUESTA

After last year's defensive disasters, which included an embarrassing 6-1 thrashing by Ecuador, new Colombia coach Reinaldo Rueda has given a first senior call-up to a former Under-20 team captain. After making his name with Atletico Nacional, the 22-year-old centre-back has adapted really well to European football since moving to Belgian side Genk back in 2019. Calm and classy.

Angel MENA

The surprise star of the opening four rounds of World Cup qualification with two goals and three assists, the little left-footed playmaker had always looked something of a lightweight at international level. But, filled with confidence by coach Gustavo Alfaro, the 33-year-old was at the heart of Ecuador's spectacular 2020 form. He's been outstanding at club level too, scoring 17 Liga MX goals for Leon. Can he keep it up?

Angel ROMERO



Emerging from the shadow of his twin brother Oscar, a talented left-footed playmaker, Angel is a busy right-footed striker able to play wide or through the middle. Paraguay have been short of goals, yet Romero scored four of the six they managed in the first four rounds of World Cup qualifying. His first international goals came in 2014; now, it seems, he may have found his feet at this level.

Gianluca LAPADULA

Once scored a hat-trick for Italy B, but has now opted to play for the land of his mother's birth. A strong character, Lapadula is especially interesting because he can either deputise for veteran centre-forward Paolo Guerrero or play off him as a second striker. He scored 11 Serie A goals for relegated Lecce last season, before joining Benevento in September.

Darwin NUNEZ

Imposing striker who, despite an uneven debut season with Benfica, appears to have got in front of Valencia's Maxi Gomez as first in line to deputise for (and eventually replace) the Luis Suarez-Edinson Cavani duo. With the amount of games coming up, he should get plenty of chances. Became the most expensive player in the Spanish second tier's history when he left Almeria.

Jefferson SAVARINO

Bright, talented and tricky attacking midfielder, now most often used on the right wing. After spending three years in Major League Soccer with Real Salt Lake - initially on loan from Zulia - Savarino is now finding form and growing in confidence in Brazil with Atletico Mineiro. Scored twice and got three assists in the 2021 Copa Libertadores group stage.

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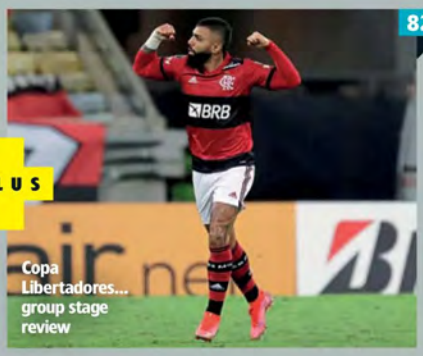

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CAF Champions League...semi-finalists now decided

The month in numbers

The facts and stats that have caught our eye in the world of football this month...

41
League goals scored by Bayern Munich's Robert Lewandowski in 2020-21, breaking Gerd Muller's 49-year record for goals in a single Bundesliga season.

Record breaker... Lewandowski

20
Years since a Spanish side lost a major European final to a non-Spanish team (Bayern Munich beat Valencia in the Champions League back in 2001).

265
In the last three seasons, Liverpool and Manchester City have each collected the exact same number of Premier League points.

36
Geronimo Rulli's Europa League-winning penalty in the shootout for Villarreal versus Manchester United was the 36th penalty in a row that David De Gea has failed to save.

15
Age of Wisdom Amey, Bologna centre-back who became the youngest player in Serie A history when he made his debut at the end of the season.

2
Andres Iniesta will continue playing until 2023 after signing a new two-year deal at Vissel Kobe.

184
Total Premier League goals scored by departing Manchester City striker Sergio Aguero – one clear of Wayne Rooney's all-time record for most scored for a single club.

3
By winning the Coppa Italia, Cristiano Ronaldo became the first player in history to win every domestic honour in three of Europe's five major leagues: England, Italy and Spain.

7
Consecutive league games that on-loan Arsenal midfielder Joe Willock scored in for Newcastle United, equalling the club record held previously by Alan Shearer.

18
Bundesliga assists for Bayern Munich's Thomas Muller – no player in Europe's top five leagues created more goals.

1
By scoring in stoppage-time against West Bromwich Albion, Alisson became the first goalkeeper to score a header in Premier League history, and the first Liverpool goalkeeper to score at all.

Heading heroics...Alisson

Play-off winners...Brentford

10
Brentford won in the play-offs for the first time in their history at the tenth time of asking, and will be the 50th team to play in the Premier League after beating Swansea City at Wembley.

6
Coppa Italia crowns won by Gianluigi Buffon, drawing him level with Roberto Mancini as the competition's most successful player.

100
Penalties scored in the Premier League in 2020-21 – the first campaign in the competition's history to reach triple figures for penalty goals.

8
Players so far inducted into the Premier League Hall of Fame – Alan Shearer, Thierry Henry, Eric Cantona, Roy Keane, Frank Lampard, Dennis Bergkamp, Steven Gerrard and David Beckham.

13
Seasons in which Lionel Messi has scored 30 or more goals in all comps, with the Argentine also winning a record-extending eighth Pichichi trophy.

La Liga top scorer...Leo

1.4m
Sum in pounds that Inter Miami were fined after an inquiry into their signing of Blaise Matuidi.

24
Cruz Azul, Mexico's fourth most successful team, finally ended their 24-year wait for the Liga MX trophy and ended their "curse".

Tuvalu

STEVE MENARY

CONIFA Cup... Tuvalu travelled to London in 2018

Fighting hard for acceptance

Tiny Pacific nation desperate for FIFA recognition

The remote South Pacific island of Tuvalu was one of the few parts of the world to escape the COVID-19 pandemic.

Formerly part of the British territory of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, Tuvalu became independent in 1978, and consists of nine atolls with a landmass of 26km squared and a population of 11,500. Unlike many other Pacific islands, football rather than rugby is the main sport and was played throughout the pandemic.

Nauti FC, from the main island of Funafuti where half the population lives, are traditionally the league's most dominant side, but were pipped to the 2021 National Provident Fund Championship League title by Tofaga.

Tofaga are based on the largest atoll of Vaitupu, which has a population of around 1,000 people but is still able to field teams in Tuvalu's two male divisions and the women's competition. "Every island has two men's teams, and only some islands have a women's team," explains Soseala Tinilau, president of the Tuvalu Islands Football Association (TIFA).

This season, Lakena United from Nanumea atoll, Tamanuku from Nukufetau and Vaoloa Nui all ran three sides and only Niutao, Nukulaelae and Ha'apai from Nanumaga were unable to enter a women's team.

Tuvalu has toured Europe twice, visiting the Netherlands for a three-month tour in 2013 then taking part in the 2018 CONIFA World Football Cup in London, a competition for teams that aren't recognised by FIFA. However, the islanders have not played since a 13-0 hammering by the Solomon Islands in July 2019 at the Pacific Games football tournament in Samoa.

The development of football on Tuvalu is remarkable given the island's isolation and its status as one of only a handful of independent nations recognised by the United Nations but not accepted by FIFA.

Tinilau adds: "We need to become a full Oceania Football Confederation member first, then become a FIFA member. We've tried in the past to email FIFA for help but there is always a need to go back to OFC."

UN recognition is usually the main criteria for international acceptance, but Tuvalu's lack of facilities – including a stadium and hotel – has been the main stumbling block. With little money for development, no Tuvaluan club has ever played abroad.

"So far, no clubs have entered OFC competitions as we are only an associate member of OFC and are yet to be a full member," explains Tinilau. "Hopefully, OFC will invite TIFA to compete in some of their competitions this year, as mentioned in our correspondence with OFC management officers.

"TIFA's competing at the international level depends on the current situation because of travel restrictions, and the issue of finance will come into play as TIFA needs a substantial amount of money to compete at the international level."

Tuvalu want to join FIFA and are being helped by the OFC, who are providing NZ$30,000 this year and in 2022.

Steffi Ah Yuk, the OFC's head of communications, says that this money is to help with "national team development, corporate governance, and administration as well as football development programmes", which need to be addressed in both islands before Tuvalu can become a full OFC member.

Only then can Tinilau and his fellow Tuvaluans start to consider their ultimate goal of FIFA membership.

> With little money for development, no Tuvaluan club has ever played abroad

Haringey...Tuvalu's 23-man squad played all of their games in North London

All images supplied by Steve Menary

South America

TIM VICKERY

Shock result... River's makeshift goalkeeper Enzo Perez (R) with coach Marcelo Gallardo (C) and team-mate Jose Paradela (L)

Copa Libertadores group stage round-up

Brazilian and Argentine clubs once again dominate the continental competition

Six frenetic weeks of action in the group phase of the Copa Libertadores produced a very similar result to the last four years. In 2017 the competition was extended to last throughout the calendar year – and from that moment the domination of Brazil and Argentina has been all but complete.

The action will resume in mid-July with the first knockout round, where all but four of the last 16 teams will come from the continent's big two.

Only Santos failed to make the cut. They lost an all-Brazilian final back in January, but the team's heroic battle against the club's financial problems could not be sustained, and their poor campaign was not a surprise.

Truly shocking would have been the elimination of Argentine giants River Plate – but it very nearly happened. Over the seven-year reign of coach Marcelo Gallardo, River have been consistently strong in the Libertadores. But the loss of playmaker Ignacio Fernandez to Brazilian side Atletico Mineiro – a significant move – was a blow, and the team were not convincing at all, even at full strength. It was a real problem, then, when 20 players tested positive for coronavirus – especially as River had named a squad of 32, rejecting the offer to register 50 players to cover this very situation. With one injured, River were down to 11 for the visit of Santa Fe of Colombia in the penultimate round, and none of them were goalkeepers. Veteran midfielder Enzo Perez, carrying a muscle injury, went in goal and watched as Santa Fe buckled under the pressure, conceding two early goals and losing 2-1. River

Ignacio Fernandez... the ex-River Plate playmaker now plays for Brazil's Atletico Mineiro

rushed players back into action for the final game, at home to Fluminense of Brazil, but were beaten 3-1. It would have eliminated them had Junior beaten Santa Fe, who had nothing to play for, in the all-Colombian other match. But now it was Junior's turn to self-destruct. They could not break the deadlock and they, like all the Colombian teams, were eliminated.

In the first knockout round, all but four of the last 16 teams will come from the continent's big two

It did not help their cause that they were unable to play some of their last matches at home. The wave of social unrest in Colombia – which forced the country to give up co-hosting the Copa America – meant that games were switched to other countries.

But there is a pattern here. Atletico Nacional won the trophy in 2016. Since then only one Colombian team has made it out of the group phase, when Nacional themselves went out in the 2018 round of 16. This was Colombia's third consecutive wipeout. It was the eighth for Peru, and though Deportivo Tachira came very close, it was the fifth (and the 11th in 12 years) for Venezuela.

The 2021 Libertadores has also come to an early end for Uruguay and Bolivia. Indeed, Bolivia have also drawn a blank in the Copa Sudamericana, the Europa League equivalent. It is the only country for whom all international club competition came to a close before the end of May.

Gus Poyet's Universidad Catolica shook off a poor start and stormed down the home straight to give Chile an interest in the knockout stages. And, as so often in recent years, Ecuador and Paraguay punched above their weight. They were the only two countries, apart from Brazil and Argentina, whose clubs accumulated more wins than defeats.

The traditional Paraguayan duo of Olimpia and Cerro Porteno left it late, dramatically so in the case of Olimpia, but both booked their slots in the last 16. The pair from the Ecuadorian capital, Independiente del Valle and Liga of Quito (or LDU) had some good moments but finished third, and have to make do with a place in the Sudamericana. But Barcelona of Guayaquil qualified in style, topping a group that contained Boca Juniors as well as Santos.

More Brazilian and Argentine opponents await. In addition to Boca and River, Argentina have Velez Sarsfield, Defensa y Justicia, Racing and Argentinos Juniors, wielded into an interesting outfit by the former Barcelona and Argentina defender Gabriel Milito.

The Brazilian contingent is headed by the last two champions, Palmeiras and Flamengo, plus 2013 winners Atletico Mineiro, Sao Paulo, Internacional and Fluminense.

There were some big margin Brazilian wins, especially at home. In 42 games the Brazilian clubs accumulated 88 goals, compared with 50 by the Argentines in six fewer matches.

The lesson would seem to be clear. Distances have opened up in South American football. The big Brazilian clubs have the financial muscle to assemble deep squads, and are scouting around the continent better than ever before. And so far they have suffered less than the others from the rise of Major League Soccer, a destination for many South Americans. When the knockout rounds begin, unless a year of non-stop domestic football takes its toll, the Brazilians will be the favourites.

Joint-top scorer... Flamengo striker Gabriel Barbosa stuck six goals in the group stage

Impressive... Barcelona SC captain Damian Diaz

Africa

MARK GLEESON

Final four emerge in CAF Champions League

Al Ahly favourites to retain their crown

Mamelodi Sundowns had looked the form team in the group phase of the African Champions League, but for a second successive year they ran into an Egyptian roadblock in the quarter-finals.

Holders Al Ahly might have stumbled and fumbled their way through the six group matches between February and April, and finished an embarrassing second behind unheralded Simba of Tanzania, but they were back to their customary efficiency in eliminating the super-rich South African club in the last eight.

It was a dream draw for the competition, not only pitting the two clubs together for the third successive season at the quarter-final stage, but made even more spicy by the fact that Ahly coach Pitso Mosimane had moved to the Cairo club last September after seven trophy-ladened seasons with Sundowns.

Mosimane, whose hiring by a club of Ahly's prestige has been a source of pride for South African football, got a surprisingly hostile reception from a small group of "protestors" outside of the Pretoria stadium for the second leg, but by then had already mostly completed the successful elimination of his old club.

One week earlier, Ahly had weathered an early storm at home in the first leg before going 1-0 up through Taher Mohamed's thumping 23rd-minute shot, but what proved crucial in the end was a

Holders...Al Ahly celebrate scoring against Mamelodi Sundowns

Drama...Kaizer Chiefs and Simba served up a seven-goal thriller over two legs

horror error by Sundowns goalkeeper Denis Onyango late in the game – charging out of his goal to collect a high cross but then missing it completely – that allowed Ahly a 2-0 win and a degree of comfort for the return leg.

Their aggregate advantage was extended just 11 minutes into the second leg when Yasser Ibrahim headed home from a corner and, although Sundowns pulled a goal back thereafter, Ahly's five-man defensive wall was never under any threat of being broken down again.

Mosimane is now on course to win a third Champions League as a coach – one with Sundowns in 2016 and Al Ahly last season, within two months of having arrived in Egypt. Only the Portuguese Manuel Jose has won more than two, taking Ahly to the title in 2002, 2005, 2006 and 2008.

The holders – and record nine-time Champions League winners – will now take on Esperance in their two-legged semi-final after the Tunisians pulled off some belated heroics to eliminate Chabab Belouizdad of Algeria.

Mohamed Ali Ben Romdhane's rasping long-range effort levelled the aggregate score at 2-2 just three minutes from the end of the second leg, forcing the tie to penalties.

The Tunisians, who are perennial challengers in the Champions League, had substituted on Farouk Ben Mustapha in goal for the post-match shootout and it proved inspired as he saved twice to see them through 3-2 on spot kicks.

Wydad Casablanca, winners in 2017 and runners-up in 2019, meet South African rookies Kaizer Chiefs in the other semi-final with Wydad heavily fancied to progress to the decider on July 17.

Al Ahly's Pitso Mosimane is now on course to win a third Champions League as a coach

LEFT: Challenge... Sundowns defender Mosa Lebusa lunges into a tackle on Al Ahly's Aliou Dieng

BELOW: Semi-finalists...Esperance star Abdelraouf Benguit (left) with Abdelkader Bedrane

The two clubs shared the same group and Wydad thrashed Chiefs 4-0 in neutral Burkina Faso before losing by a solitary goal in Johannesburg.

Wydad eliminated Mouloudia Alger in the quarter-finals, drawing 1-1 away in the first leg before winning 1-0 at home in the return, scoring a late winner through Walid El Karti after earlier missing a myriad of opportunities.

Kaizer Chiefs are having their worst-ever domestic season, hit hard by a FIFA transfer ban that denied them a chance to refresh an ageing squad, but have ridden their luck in the Champions League after qualifying for the group phase for the first time.

They scraped through in second place in their group with a come-from-behind draw at Horoya of Guinea, and then had the good fortune to avoid any of the top teams and instead drew Simba in the last eight.

The Tanzanians might have finished above Al Ahly in their group but that looked a misnomer as Kaizer Chiefs thrashed them 4-0 in the first leg with two goals from their Serbian striker Samir Nurkovic and one from Colombian import Leonardo Castro.

But it almost fell apart in the return match, as Simba gallantly fought back to score three times past a porous Chiefs defence. In the end the South Africans were hanging on grimly to take the tie 4-3 on aggregate.

In the meantime, the Confederation of African Football have decided the final will be in Casablanca. It is only the second time the final is a single-game affair since a change in the competition rules in 2019. For almost a half century, it used to be decided over two home-and-away legs.

Myanmar

JOHN DUERDEN

Playing amid the protests

Politics and football clash as the Myanmar national team returns to action

In November 2019, the Myanmar national team served up a real treat for their supporters in qualification for the 2022 World Cup. First, they managed a thrilling 4-3 win over a much-improved Tajikistan team in Mandalay, the country's second city, then a few days later they defeated Mongolia 1-0 in front of almost 20,000 fans. They would not play again for another 18 months, and when they did return to action it was not so happy: a 10-0 thrashing by Japan at the end of May was their biggest-ever defeat.

Qualification for the Qatar World Cup is now not going to happen, but as these qualifiers also act as a road to China and the 2023 Asian Cup, an appearance on the continental stage is a realistic goal. It was 1968 when Myanmar last participated in the tournament, but there is a chance that that half-century drought will end.

Or, at least, there was.

Now, the country is in chaos, with everything up in the air. In February the military, which first took power back in 1962, staged a coup to take back full control of the country after years of quasi-democracy. It was met by significant protests from the population all over the Southeast Asian country and hundreds, perhaps more, have

Myanmar... protesters play football in the streets

been killed by the military.

Football players have also been involved with the protests. "We will only play football on the street until we get democracy," said national team goalkeeper Kyaw Zin Htet. "We won't play for the national team under the military dictatorship. We are all going forward and won't do these things that go backward. That's why we are not going to play."

A group of players from the league protested in Yangon, as did around 700 fans of English Premier League teams. Wearing shirts from the so-called "Big Six", they marched on the British Embassy.

"We've given all our souls and energy to support the favourite clubs in our lives," said Zarni Maung, a 30-year-old Liverpool supporter. "I wish they would hear us and know what's happening in my country. Our fans were very excited waiting for the upcoming fixtures. But now we can't even focus on the matches, and work on the protests. Being under the military junta is such a pain."

There were protests overseas too. Hein Htet Aung plays in Malaysia's second tier and the Myanmar player was hit with a one-game ban after performing a three-finger gesture (a reference to the dystopian *Hunger Games* film and book series) used by protestors back home, while in action for Selangor II in March. "Football must be above race, religion and politics," Baljit Singh Sidhu, chairman of the Football Association of Malaysia's association's disciplinary committee said. "Football must be used to unite people and not to divide them – and should not take sides with anybody."

Yet politics are mixed with football all over Asia. There have been no calls to throw the team out of qualification for the World Cup or anything else, although Myanmar National League clubs Shan United and Hantharwady United will withdraw from the AFC Champions League and the AFC Cup (Asia's second-tier club competition) respectively.

National team coach Antonie Hey has tried to talk about the political situation as little as possible and has said that he is looking forward to the challenge: "We are working on our dream," he said. "Myanmar has been waiting for the AFC [Asian] Cup qualification for more than 50 years. Football has the power to build bridges and to reconcile. With this in mind, we hope for the support and blessings of all the people of Myanmar."

Many of the country's best players, around ten, kept to their word and did not go to Japan. The Myanmar Football Federation said on its website that they ran the risk of future suspension but with a number of them returning back to their home provinces and reportedly undergoing military training, they are likely to have other things on their minds.

> "We won't play for the national team under the military dictatorship"
>
> Myanmar goalkeeper Kyaw Zin Htet

Even the players who made themselves available for the trip to Japan had not seen any kind of competitive action for over six months. It was less than ideal.

At least a few play overseas these days, which is a relatively recent phenomenon. Myanmar players were regarded in Southeast Asia as risky imports as there was an idea that you needed to sign at least two, preferably three (as Singapore's Balestier Khalsa did in 2017) in order to help them settle. Now, they can be seen in Malaysia and also Thailand, the best league in Southeast Asia.

This helps in the long-term but in the short, the 2022 World Cup is off the table. It remains to be seen whether the team can make it to the Asian Cup, but there are bigger issues than that.

Premier League protesters...fans of the "Big Six" took to the streets of Yangon

JUNE 18-JULY 15, 2021

Global diary

Games and dates to pencil in for the month ahead

(All kick-off times are BST)

Friday June 18

SOUTH AMERICA: Uruguay's Copa America campaign begins against their neighbours and fierce rivals Argentina. Kick-off 1am.
EUROPE: In the Euros, England v Scotland is the headline tie (8pm), but the day's action begins with Sweden v Slovakia (2pm), followed by Croatia v Czech Republic (5pm).
AFRICA: Both CAF Champions League semi-final first legs kick off at 8pm, with Esperance v Al Ahly and Wydad against Kaizer Chiefs.

Saturday June 19

SOUTH AMERICA: In the Copa America North Group, Colombia face Venezuela at midnight, while Peru face hosts Brazil three hours later in a repeat of the 2019 final.
EUROPE: On Saturday it's Euro 2020's "group of death", with Hungary hosting France at 2pm and Portugal facing Germany at 5pm. Later, Poland take on Spain.

Sunday June 20

EUROPE: Wales face their biggest challenge of the group stage as they head to Rome to take on Italy. At the same time, Switzerland face Turkey as Group A concludes.
AFRICA: The CAF Confederation Cup – Africa's Europa League equivalent – reaches the semi-final stage, with Egyptian outfit Pyramids hosting Raja Casabalanca of Morocco, while Cameroonians Cotonsport face Kabylie from Algeria. Both kick-offs 8pm.
SOUTH AMERICA: Uruguay take on Chile in their second game of the Copa America. Kick-off 9pm.

Monday June 21

SOUTH AMERICA: At midnight, Argentina play Paraguay before Venezuela face Ecuador at 11pm.
EUROPE: At 5pm Group C reaches its climax, with North Macedonia playing Netherlands while Ukraine face Austria. Then at 8pm, Finland play Belgium and Russia take on Denmark in Group B.

Tuesday June 22

SOUTH AMERICA: At 2am Colombia take on Peru in the Copa America North Group.
EUROPE: Group D concludes from 8pm, with Croatia taking on Scotland and Czech Republic facing England at Wembley.

Rivals...Leo Messi will face his old team-mate Luis Suarez at the Copa America

Wednesday June 23

EUROPE: At 5pm it's Group E's turn to finish, with Slovakia v Spain and Sweden v Poland. At 8pm it's a repeat of the 2016 final as France play Portugal, while Germany face Hungary in Group F's other match.
SOUTH AMERICA: In the South Group's penultimate round, Bolivia face-off against Uruguay (10pm).

Thursday June 24

SOUTH AMERICA: Chile and Paraguay meet at 1am, before Ecuador battle Peru in the Copa America North Group at 11pm.

Friday June 25

SOUTH AMERICA: It's Colombia v Brazil at 2am in the Copa America.
AFRICA: The CAF Champions League semi-final second legs are to be decided from 8pm.

Saturday June 26

EUROPE: Euro 2020's knockout stages begin, with eight round of 16 clashes kicking off at 5pm and 8pm over the next four days.

Sunday June 27

SOUTH AMERICA: The Copa America South Group concludes with Argentina v Bolivia and Uruguay v Paraguay at 10pm.
AFRICA: The second legs of the CAF Confederation Cup semi-finals begin at 8pm.

Tuesday June 29

SOUTH AMERICA: The Copa America North Group concludes at 2am when Ecuador play Brazil and Venezuela take on Peru.

Friday July 2

EUROPE: Euro 2020's first quarter-finals kick off at 5pm and 8pm.
SOUTH AMERICA: Copa America's quarter-finals begin with the south's second-placed team taking on the north's third-placed team at 10pm.

Saturday July 3

SOUTH AMERICA: At 1am the south's winners meet the fourth-best team from the north. Then at 11pm, the North Group runners-up face the South Group's third team.
EUROPE: Euro 2020's last quarter-finals kick off at 5pm and 8pm.

Sunday July 4

SOUTH AMERICA: The final Copa America quarter-final takes place between the North Group winners and the fourth-placed team from the south. Kick-off at 2am.

Tuesday July 6

SOUTH AMERICA: It's the first Copa America semi at midnight.
EUROPE: At 8pm, the first Euro 2020 semi-final kicks off.
CONCACAF: The final three teams at the 2021 Gold Cup are decided by play-offs in Fort Lauderdale.

Wednesday July 7

SOUTH AMERICA: The other Copa America semi-final kicks off at 2am.
EUROPE: At 8pm Wembley hosts its second Euro 2020 semi-final.

Saturday July 10

SOUTH AMERICA: Unlike the Euros, the Copa America will stage a third-place play-off. Kick-off 1am.
CONCACAF: The first game of the 2021 Gold Cup kicks off in Texas as El Salvador face Curacao at 10pm.

Sunday July 11

SOUTH AMERICA: The Copa America final kicks off at 1am.
EUROPE: At 8pm, it's back to Wembley for the Euro 2020 final.
CONCACAF: Mexico begin their Gold Cup campaign at 3am, then it's Canada v Martinique at 11.30pm.

Monday July 12

CONCACAF: USA's Gold Cup action begins at 1.30am, while it's Jamaica v Suriname in Group C at 11.30pm.

Tuesday July 13

CONCACAF: Group C continues at 2am with Costa Rica in action.

Wednesday July 14

CONCACAF: Group D kicks off at midnight with guests Qatar taking on Panama, followed by Honduras v Grenada two hours later.

Thursday July 15

CONCACAF: Gold Cup Group A continues with El Salvador in action at 12.30am, before Curacao face favourites Mexico two hours later.

Holders...Mexico won the last CONCACAF Gold Cup in 2019

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

Runaway winner... Robert Lewandowski

Surprise package... Eintracht's Andre Silva

ESM GOLDEN SHOE 2020-21: FINAL RANKINGS

ESM EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

GOLDEN SHOE

Pos	Name	Goals	Factor	Pts
1	Robert Lewandowski *(Bayern Munich)*	41	2	82
2	Lionel Messi *(Barcelona)*	30	2	60
3	Cristiano Ronaldo *(Juventus)*	29	2	58
4	Andre Silva *(Eintracht Frankfurt)*	28	2	56
5=	Erling Haaland *(Borussia Dortmund)*	27	2	54
5=	Kylian Mbappe *(Paris Saint-Germain)*	27	2	54
7	**ROMELU LUKAKU** *(Internazionale)*	24	2	48
8=	**KARIM BENZEMA** *(Real Madrid)*	23	2	46
8=	**GERARD MORENO** *(Villarreal)*	23	2	46
8=	**HARRY KANE** *(Tottenham Hotspur)*	23	2	46
11=	**LUIS MURIEL** *(Atalanta)*	22	2	44
11=	**MOHAMED SALAH** *(Liverpool)*	22	2	44
13	**PAUL ONUACHU** *(Genk)*	29	1.5	43.5
14=	**LUIS SUAREZ** *(Atletico Madrid)*	21	2	42
14=	**DUSAN VLAHOVIC** *(Fiorentina)*	21	2	42
16	**KASPER JUNKER** *(Bodo/Glimt)*	27	1.5	40.5
17=	**MEMPHIS DEPAY** *(Lyon)*	20	2	40
17=	**CIRO IMMOBILE** *(Lazio)*	20	2	40
17=	**ANDREJ KRAMARIC** *(Hoffenheim)*	20	2	40
17=	**SIMY NWANKWO** *(Crotone)*	20	2	40
17=	**WOUT WEGHORST** *(Wolfsburg)*	20	2	40
17=	**WISSAM BEN YEDDER** *(Monaco)*	20	2	40
23	**GIORGOS GIAKOUMAKIS** *(VVV-Venlo)*	26	1.5	39
24	**LORENZO INSIGNE** *(Napoli)*	19	2	38
25=	**MILAN MAKARIC** *(Radnik Surdulica)*	25	1.5	37.5
25=	**AMAHL PELLEGRINO** *(Kristiansund)*	25	1.5	37.5
27=	**YOUSSEF EN-NESYRI** *(Sevilla)*	18	2	36
27=	**BRUNO FERNANDES** *(Manchester United)*	18	2	36
29	**PEDRO 'POTE' GONCALVES** *(Sporting)*	23	1.5	34.5
30=	**PATRICK BAMFORD** *(Leeds United)*	17	2	34
30=	**ALEXANDER ISAK** *(Real Sociedad)*	17	2	34
30=	**LAUTARO MARTINEZ** *(Internazionale)*	17	2	34
30=	**HEUNG-MIN SON** *(Tottenham Hotspur)*	17	2	34
34=	**AARON BOUPENDZA** *(Hatayspor)*	22	1.5	33
34=	**ZACHARY HADJI** *(Fola Esch)*	33	1	33
34=	**RAMON MIEREZ** *(Osijek)*	22	1.5	33
34=	**HARIS SEFEROVIC** *(Benfica)*	22	1.5	33
38=	**LUDOVIC AJORQUE** *(Strasbourg)*	16	2	32
38=	**DOMENICO BERARDI** *(Sassuolo)*	16	2	32
38=	**DOMINIC CALVERT-LEWIN** *(Everton)*	16	2	32
38=	**SASA KALAJDZIC** *(Stuttgart)*	16	2	32
38=	**GAETAN LABORDE** *(Montpellier)*	16	2	32
38=	**JOAO PEDRO** *(Cagliari)*	16	2	32
38=	**KEVIN VOLLAND** *(Monaco)*	16	2	32
38=	**BURAK YILMAZ** *(Lille)*	16	2	32
46	**THOMAS HENRY** *(OH Leuven)*	21	1.5	31.5
47=	**GIANNI BRUNO** *(Zulte Waregem)*	20	1.5	30
47=	**PATSON DAKA** *(Red Bull Salzburg)*	20	1.5	30
47=	**ANDY DELORT** *(Montpellier)*	15	2	30
47=	**ARTEM DZYUBA** *(Zenit St. Petersburg)*	20	1.5	30
47=	**ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC** *(Milan)*	15	2	30
47=	**JAMIE VARDY** *(Leicester City)*	15	2	30
47=	**DUVAN ZAPATA** *(Atalanta)*	15	2	30
54=	**YOUSSEF EL-ARABI** *(Olympiakos)*	19	1.5	28.5
54=	**SARDAR AZMOUN** *(Zenit St. Petersburg)*	19	1.5	28.5
54=	**MAME BIRAM DIOUF** *(Hatayspor)*	19	1.5	28.5
54=	**CYLE LARIN** *(Besiktas)*	19	1.5	28.5
54=	**DONYELL MALEN** *(PSV)*	19	1.5	28.5
54=	**JEAN-PIERRE NSAME** *(Young Boys)*	19	1.5	28.5
54=	**PHILIP ZINCKERNAGEL** *(Bodo/Glimt)*	19	1.5	28.5

Sporting star... Pedro 'Pote' Goncalves

Club Football

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2020-21

Quarter-Finals - Leg 1

Apr 6 - Manchester
Manchester City 2 (De Bruyne 19, Foden 90)
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Reus 84)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Hategan (Rou)
Manchester City: Ederson - Walker, Stones, Dias, Cancelo, Rodri, Gundogan, Silva (Jesus 59), De Bruyne, Foden, Mahrez.
Borussia Dortmund: Hitz - Morey (Meunier 81), Hummels, Akanji, Guerreiro, Can, Knauff (Reyna 63), Dahoud (Delaney 81), Bellingham, Reus, Haaland.

Apr 6 - Madrid
Real Madrid 3 (Vinicius 27, 65, Asensio 36)
Liverpool 1 (Salah 51)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Real Madrid: Courtois - Vazquez, Nacho, Militao, Mendy, Casemiro, Modric, Kroos, Asensio (Valverde 70), Benzema, Vinicius (Rodrygo 85).
Liverpool: Alisson - Alexander-Arnold, Phillips, Kabak (Firmino 81), Robertson, Wijnaldum, Keita (Thiago 42), Fabinho, Salah, Mane, Jota (Shaqiri 81).

Apr 7 - Sevilla
Porto 0
Chelsea 2 (Mount 32, Chilwell 85)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Vincic (Svn)
Porto: Marchesin - Pepe, Mbemba, Manafa (Conceicao 83), Sanusi, Uribe, Otavio (Vieira 83), Grujic, Corona, Marega (Martinez 83), Diaz.
Chelsea: Mendy - Azpilicueta, Rudiger, Christensen, Chilwell, James (Silva 80), Kovacic (Emerson 90+2), Jorginho, Mount (Kante 80), Havertz (Giroud 65), Werner (Pulisic 65).

Apr 7 - Munich
Bayern Munich 2 (Choupo-Moting 37, Muller 60)
PSG 3 (Mbappe 3, 68, Marquinhos 28)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Mateu (Esp)
Bayern Munich: Neuer - Pavard, Alaba, Sule (Boateng 42), Hernandez, Goretzka (Davies 33), Kimmich, Muller, Choupo-Moting, Coman, Sane.
PSG: Navas - Dagba, Marquinhos (Herrera 30), Kimpembe, Diallo (Bakker 46), Di Maria (Kean 71), Gueye, Danilo, Draxler, Neymar (Rafinha 90), Mbappe.

Quarter-Finals - Leg 2

Apr 13 - Sevilla
Chelsea 0 (2)
Porto 1 (1) (Taremi 90+3)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)
Chelsea: Mendy - Silva, Azpilicueta, Rudiger, Chilwell, James, Jorginho, Kante, Mount (Ziyech 86), Pulisic, Havertz (Giroud 90+2).
Porto: Marchesin - Pepe, Mbemba, Manafa (Nanu 75), Sanusi, Oliveira (Vieira 84), Uribe, Otavio, Grujic (Taremi 63), Corona (Diaz 75), Marega (Evanilson 75).

Apr 13 - Paris
PSG 0 (3)*
Bayern Munich 1 (3) (Choupo-Moting 40)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)
**PSG win on away goals*
PSG: Navas - Dagba, Kimpembe, Danilo, Diallo (Bakker 58), Gueye, Paredes, Di Maria (Herrera 88), Draxler (Kean 73), Neymar, Mbappe.
Bayern Munich: Neuer - Pavard, Boateng, Alaba, Hernandez, Davies (Musiala 71), Kimmich, Muller, Choupo-Moting (Martinez 85), Coman, Sane.

Apr 14 - Dortmund
Borussia Dortmund 1 (2) (Bellingham 15)
Manchester City 2 (4) (Mahrez 55 pen, Foden 75)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Cerro (Esp)
Borussia Dortmund: Hitz - Morey (Tigges 81), Hummels, Guerreiro, Akanji, Can, Dahoud (T. Hazard 76), Bellingham (Brandt 81), Knauff (Reyna 68), Reus, Haaland.
Manchester City: Ederson - Walker, Stones, Dias, Zinchenko, Rodri, Gundogan, Silva, De Bruyne, Foden, Mahrez (Sterling 88).

Apr 14 - Liverpool
Liverpool 0 (1)
Real Madrid 0 (3)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kuipers (Ned)
Liverpool: Alisson - Alexander-Arnold, Phillips, Kabak (Jota 60), Robertson, Milner (Thiago 60), Wijnaldum, Fabinho, Firmino (Shaqiri 82), Salah, Mane (Oxlade-Chamberlain 82).
Real Madrid: Courtois - Valverde, Nacho, Militao, Mendy, Casemiro, Modric, Kroos (Odriozola 72), Asensio (Isco 82), Benzema, Vinicius (Rodrygo 72).

Semi-Finals - Leg 1

Apr 27 - Madrid
Real Madrid 1 (Benzema 29)
Chelsea 1 (Pulisic 14)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Makkelie (Ned)
Real Madrid: Courtois - Carvajal (Odriozola 77), Varane, Militao, Nacho, Marcelo (Asensio 77), Casemiro, Modric, Kroos, Benzema (Rodrygo 90+2), Vinicius (E. Hazard 66).
Chelsea: Mendy - Silva, Rudiger, Christensen, Azpilicueta (James 66), Chilwell, Jorginho, Kante, Mount, Pulisic (Ziyech 66), Werner (Havertz 66).

Apr 28 - Paris
PSG 1 (Marquinhos 15)
Manchester City 2 (De Bruyne 64, Mahrez 71)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
PSG: Navas - Florenzi, Marquinhos, Kimpembe, Bakker, Verratti, Gueye, Paredes (Herrera 83), Di Maria (Danilo 80), Neymar, Mbappe.
Sent off: Gueye 77.
Manchester City: Ederson - Walker, Stones, Dias, Cancelo (Zinchenko 61), Rodri, Silva, Gundogan, De Bruyne, Foden, Mahrez.

Semi-Finals - Leg 2

May 4 - Manchester
Manchester City 2 (4) (Mahrez 11, 63)
PSG 0 (1)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Kuipers (Ned)
Manchester City: Ederson - Walker, Stones, Dias, Zinchenko, Fernandinho, Gundogan, Silva (Sterling 82), De Bruyne (Jesus 82), Foden (Aguero 85), Mahrez.
PSG: Navas - Florenzi (Dagba 75), Marquinhos, Kimpembe, Diallo (Bakker 82), Herrera (Draxler 62), Verratti, Paredes (Danilo 75), Di Maria, Neymar, Icardi (Kean 62). *Sent off: Di Maria 69.*

May 5 - London
Chelsea 2 (3) (Werner 28, Mount 85)
Real Madrid 0 (1)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)
Chelsea: Mendy - Silva, Rudiger, Christensen, Azpilicueta (James 88), Chilwell, Jorginho, Kante, Mount (Ziyech 89), Havertz, Werner (Pulisic 67).
Real Madrid: Courtois - Militao, Ramos, Nacho, Mendy (Valverde 63), Casemiro (Rodrygo 76), Modric, Kroos, Benzema, E. Hazard (Diaz 89), Vinicius (Asensio 63).

EUROPA LEAGUE 2020-21

Quarter-Finals - Leg 1

Apr 8 - Granada
Granada 0
Man. United 2 (Rashford 31, Fernandes 90 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Dias (Por)
Granada: Silva - Diaz, Vallejo, Duarte (Sanchez 54), Neva (Foulquier 74), Montoro, Gonalons (Eteki 86), Puertas, Kenedy (Machis 75), Herrera, Soldado (Suarez 87).
Manchester United: De Gea - Wan-Bissaka, Lindelof, Maguire, Shaw (Telles 46), Pogba (Matic 74), McTominay, Fernandes, James, Rashford (Cavani 66), Greenwood (Van de Beek 85).

Apr 8 - London
Arsenal 1 (Pepe 86)
Slavia Prague 1 (Holes 90+3)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ekberg (Swe)
Arsenal: Leno - Bellerin, Holding, Gabriel, Cedric, Xhaka, Partey (Elneny 78), Smith Rowe (Ceballos 88), Saka (Pepe 78), Willian (Martinelli 73), Lacazette (Aubameyang 78).
Slavia Prague: Kolar - Boril, Holes, Bah, Zima, Stanciu (Masopust 84), Provod, Hromada (Sevcik 46), Dorley (Lingr 69), Olayinka (Traore 85), Sima (Kuchta 69).

Apr 8 - Amsterdam
Ajax 1 (Klaassen 39)
Roma 2 (Pellegrini 57, Ibanez 87)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)
Ajax: Scherpen - Alvarez, Martinez, Timber, Rensch (Klaiber 78), Tagliafico, Gravenberch, Klaassen, Tadic, Neres (Brobbey 64), Antony (Idrissi 88).
Roma: Lopez - Peres, Spinazzola (Calafiori 29), Mancini, Ibanez, Veretout (Villar 77), Cristante, Pellegrini, Diawara, Dzeko (Mayoral 77), Pedro (Perez 89).

Apr 8 - Zagreb
Dinamo Zagreb 0
Villarreal 1 (G. Moreno 44 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Siebert (Ger)
Dinamo Zagreb: Livakovic - Theophile-Catherine, Lauritsen, Gvardiol (Leovac 71), Ademi, Jakic (Kastrati 61), Ivanusec, Atiemwen (Petkovic 61), Majer (Franjic 82), Orsic (Tolic 82).
Villarreal: Rulli - Foyth, Albiol, Torres, Pedraza, Capoue, Parejo, Trigueros (Pena 86), Chukwueze (Gomez 69), Bacca (Alcacer 46), G. Moreno.

Quarter-Finals - Leg 2

Apr 15 - Manchester
Man. United 2 (4) (Cavani 6, Vallejo 90 og)
Granada 0 (0)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Kovacs (Rou)
Manchester United: De Gea - Wan-Bissaka (Williams 82), Lindelof, Tuanzebe, Telles, Matic, Pogba (Van de Beek 46), Fred, Fernandes (Mata 73), Cavani (James 60), Greenwood (Diallo 82).
Granada: Silva - Sanchez (Perez 82), Foulquier, Vallejo, Neva (Diaz 74), Montoro, Gonalons (Molina 32), Kenedy (Puertas 46), Herrera, Soldado (Suarez 46), Machis.

Apr 15 - Prague
Slavia Prague 0 (1)
Arsenal 4 (5) (Pepe 18, Lacazette 21 pen, 77, Saka 24)
HT: 0-3. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)
Slavia Prague: Kolar - Boril (Dorley 46), Holes, Bah (Visinsky 46), Zima, Stanciu (Lingr 46), Sevcik, Provod, Hromada (Masopust 46), Olayinka, Kuchta (Tecl 71).
Arsenal: Leno - Chambers, Holding, Mari, Xhaka, Partey (Cedric 79), Ceballos, Smith Rowe (Elneny 67), Saka (Martinelli 79), Lacazette (Nketiah 79), Pepe (Balogun 88).

Apr 15 - Rome
Roma 1 (3) (Dzeko 72)
Ajax 1 (2) (Brobbey 49)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)
Roma: Lopez - Karsdorp, Mancini, Ibanez, Calafiori (Villar 81), Mkhitaryan (Pedro 87), Veretout, Cristante, Pellegrini, Diawara, Dzeko (Mayoral 80).
Ajax: Stekelenburg - Klaiber (Schuurs 22, Idrissi 83), Alvarez (Kudus 69), Martinez, Timber, Tagliafico, Klaassen, Gravenberch, Tadic, Neres (Traore 83), Antony (Brobbey 46).

Apr 15 - Villarreal
Villarreal 2 (3) (Alcacer 36, G. Moreno 43)
Dinamo Zagreb 1 (1) (Orsic 74)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Makkelie (Ned)
Villarreal: Rulli - Foyth, Albiol, Torres, Pedraza (A. Moreno 90), Capoue, Parejo (Coquelin 84), Trigueros (Gomez 63), Chukwueze (Pena 90), Alcacer (Baena 90), G. Moreno.
Dinamo Zagreb: Livakovic - Theophile-Catherine (Peric 82), Ristovski (Stojanovic 62), Lauritsen, Gvardiol, Ademi (Misic 82), Jakic, Ivanusec (Atiemwen 76), Majer (Franjic 62), Orsic, Petkovic.

Semi-Finals - Leg 1

Apr 29 - Villarreal
Villarreal 2 (Trigueros 5, Albiol 29)
Arsenal 1 (Pepe 73 pen)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Dias (Por)
Villarreal: Rulli - Foyth (Gaspar 70), Albiol, Torres, Pedraza (A. Moreno 81), Capoue, Parejo, Trigueros (Gomez 80), Chukwueze, Alcacer (Coquelin 46), G. Moreno. *Sent off: Capoue 80.*
Arsenal: Leno - Chambers, Holding, Mari, Xhaka, Partey, Ceballos, Smith Rowe (Elneny 90+5), Odegaard (Martinelli 63), Saka (Aubameyang 85), Pepe (Willian 90+5).
Sent off: Ceballos 57.

Apr 29 - Manchester
Manchester United 6 (Fernandes 9, 71 pen, Cavani 48, 64, Pogba 75, Greenwood 86)
Roma 2 (Pellegrini 15 pen, Dzeko 33)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Cerro (Esp)
Manchester United: De Gea - Wan-Bissaka, Lindelof, Maguire, Shaw, Pogba, Fred (Matic 83), Fernandes (Mata 89), McTominay, Cavani, Rashford (Greenwood 76).
Roma: Lopez (Mirante 27) - Smalling, Spinazzola (Peres 37), Karsdorp, Ibanez, Mkhitaryan, Veretout (Villar 5), Cristante, Pellegrini, Diawara, Dzeko.

Semi-Finals - Leg 2

May 6 - London
Arsenal 0 (1)
Villarreal 0 (2)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vincic (Svn)
Arsenal: Leno - Bellerin (Nketiah 90+1), Holding, Mari, Tierney (Willian 80), Partey, Odegaard (Martinelli 66), Smith Rowe, Saka, Aubameyang (Lacazette 79), Pepe.
Villarreal: Rulli - Gaspar, Albiol, Torres, Pedraza (A. Moreno 90+1), Parejo, Coquelin, Trigueros, Chukwueze (Pino 30, Gomez 90+1), Alcacer (Bacca 72), G. Moreno.

May 6 - Rome
Roma 3 (5) (Dzeko 57, Cristante 60, Telles 83 og)
Manchester United 2 (8) (Cavani 39, 68)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Roma: Mirante - Smalling (Darboe 30), Peres (Santon 69), Karsdorp, Mancini, Ibanez, Mkhitaryan, Cristante, Pellegrini, Dzeko (Mayoral 76), Pedro (Kalewski 76).
Manchester United: De Gea - Wan-Bissaka (Williams 46), Maguire, Bailly, Shaw (Telles 46), Pogba (Matic 64), Fred, Fernandes (Mata 84), Van de Beek, Cavani (Rashford 73), Greenwood.

FA CUP 2020-21

Semi-Finals

Apr 17 - London
Chelsea 1 (Ziyech 55)
Manchester City 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Dean (Eng)

Apr 18 - London
Leicester City 1 (Iheanacho 55)
Southampton 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kavanagh (Eng)

Final

May 15 - London
Chelsea 0
Leicester City 1 (Tielemans 63)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)

CARABAO CUP 2020-21

Final

Apr 25 - London
Manchester City 1 (Laporte 82)
Tottenham Hotspur 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Tierney (Eng)

DFB-POKAL 2020-21

Semi-Finals

Apr 30 - Bremen
Werder Bremen 1 (Bittencourt 105+1)
RB Leipzig 2 (Hwang 93, Forsberg 120+1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Grafe (Ger)
After extra-time

May 1 - Dortmund
Borussia Dortmund 5 (Reyna 16, 22, Reus 26, T. Hazard 32, Bellingham 41)
Holstein Kiel 0
HT: 5-0. **Ref:** Dingert (Ger)

Final

May 13 - Berlin
RB Leipzig 1 (Olmo 71)
B. Dortmund 4 (Sancho 5, 45+1, Haaland 28, 87)
HT: 0-3. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)

COPPA ITALIA 2020-21

Final

May 19 - Reggio Emilia
Atalanta 1 (Malinovskyi 41)
Juventus 2 (Kulusevski 31, Chiesa 73)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Massa (Ita)

COPA DEL REY 2019-20

Final

Apr 3 - Seville
Athletic Bilbao 0
Real Sociedad 1 (Oyarzabal 63 pen)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Fernandez (Esp)

COPA DEL REY 2020-21

Final

Apr 17 - Seville
Athletic Bilbao 0
Barcelona 4 (Griezmann 60, De Jong 63, Messi 68, 72)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Munuera (Esp)

COUPE DE FRANCE 2020-21

Semi-Finals

May 12 - Montpellier
Montpellier 2 (Laborde 45, Delort 83)
Paris Saint-Germain 2* (Mbappe 10, 50)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Pignard (Fra)
**Paris Saint-Germain win 6-5 on penalties*

May 13 - Annecy
GFA Rumilly-Vallieres 1 (Peuget 20)
Monaco 5 (Bozon 27 og, Tchouameni 32, Ben Yedder 55, Fabregas 78, Golovin 82)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Buquet (Fra)

Final

May19 - Saint-Denis
Monaco 0
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Icardi 19, Mbappe 81)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Letexier (Fra)

FINAL TABLES 2020-21

ALBANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Teuta (C)	36	17	15	4	42	16	66
Vllaznia	36	19	9	8	44	22	66
Partizani	36	17	14	5	53	23	65
Laci	36	16	13	7	41	26	61
Tirana	36	15	13	8	41	26	58
Kukesi	36	13	6	17	47	48	45
Skenderbeu	36	9	10	17	34	55	37
Kastrioti*	36	8	11	17	26	44	35
Bylis (R)	36	7	10	19	28	51	31
Apolonia (R)	36	4	9	23	22	67	21

**Kastrioti won the relegation play-off*

ANDORRA

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter Club d'Escaldes (C)	20	11	6	3	34	11	39
Sant Julia	20	10	4	6	33	24	34
FC Santa Coloma	20	8	8	4	28	19	32
Atletic Club d'Escaldes	20	6	7	7	29	26	25

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Engordany	20	8	9	3	43	30	33
UE Santa Coloma	20	9	3	8	44	27	30
Carroi*	20	5	4	11	20	34	19
Penya Encarnada (R)	20	2	1	17	14	74	7

**Carroi won the relegation play-off*

ARMENIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Alashkert (C)	24	13	7	4	25	15	46
Noah	24	12	5	7	35	20	41
Urartu	24	12	5	7	28	19	41
Ararat	24	11	7	6	34	18	40
Ararat-Armenia	24	10	8	6	32	17	38
Van	24	9	4	11	25	30	31
Pyunik	24	6	7	11	20	18	25
Lori	24	7	2	15	16	44	23
Shirak (R)	24	2	7	15	19	53	13
Gandzasar (D)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

AUSTRIA

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
RB Salzburg (C)	32	25	2	5	94	33	51
Rapid Vienna	32	17	8	7	64	40	36
Sturm Graz	32	16	8	8	52	34	36
LASK	32	15	6	11	55	41	30
Wolfsberger	32	13	5	14	52	62	27
WSG Tirol	32	10	8	14	53	60	23

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hartberg	32	12	11	9	38	48	32
Austria Vienna	32	11	9	12	47	43	29
Ried	32	8	9	15	34	57	25
Rheindorf Altach	32	9	7	16	33	55	23
Admira	32	6	8	18	27	58	19
St. Polten (R)*	32	5	9	18	39	57	13

**St. Polten lost the relegation play-off*

AZERBAIJAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Neftci Baku (C)	28	18	5	5	47	25	59
Qarabag	28	16	9	3	64	18	57
Sumgayit	28	10	9	9	30	31	39
Zira	28	8	14	6	28	28	38
Sabah	28	7	8	13	28	38	29
Kesla	28	5	11	12	25	40	26
Gabala	28	5	11	12	23	44	26
Sabail	28	5	9	14	21	42	24

BELGIUM

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Brugge (C)	34	24	4	6	73	26	76
Antwerp	34	18	6	10	57	48	60
Anderlecht	34	15	13	6	51	34	58
Genk	34	16	8	10	67	48	56
Oostende	34	15	8	11	49	41	53
Standard Liege	34	13	11	10	52	41	50
Gent	34	14	7	13	55	42	49
Mechelen	34	13	9	12	54	54	48
Beerschot	34	14	5	15	58	64	47
Zulte Waregem	34	14	4	16	53	69	46
OH Leuven	34	12	9	13	54	59	45
Eupen	34	10	13	11	44	55	43
Charleroi	34	11	9	14	46	49	42
Kortrijk	34	11	6	17	44	57	39
Sint-Truiden	34	10	8	16	41	52	38
Cercle Brugge	34	11	3	20	40	51	36
Waasland-Beveren (R)*	34	8	7	19	44	70	31
Excel Mouscron (R)	34	7	10	17	32	54	31

**Waasland-Beveren lost the relegation play-off*

For play-offs to determine the European qualifiers, teams carried forward half of their season points

Play-Off I

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Brugge (C)	6	1	3	2	8	11	44
Genk	6	5	1	0	15	5	44
Antwerp	6	1	2	3	6	11	35
Anderlecht	6	0	4	2	9	11	33

Play-Off II

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gent*	6	4	1	1	13	6	38
Mechelen	6	3	2	1	15	11	35
Oostende	6	2	1	3	15	16	34
Standard Liege	6	1	0	5	7	17	28

**Gent qualified for the Europa Conference League*

BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Borac Banja Luka (C)	33	21	4	8	59	31	67
Sarajevo	33	18	11	4	53	24	65
Velez Mostar	33	16	13	4	50	30	61
Siroki Brijeg	33	17	8	8	47	30	59
Zrinjski Mostar	33	18	5	10	50	30	59
Tuzla City	33	13	9	11	36	35	48
Zeljeznicar	33	12	8	13	50	43	44
Sloboda Tuzla	33	10	7	16	31	41	37
Mladost Doboj Kakanj (R)*	33	8	6	19	26	57	30
Krupa	33	7	7	19	26	46	28
Radnik Bijeljina	33	5	10	18	26	51	25
Olimpik (R)	33	7	4	22	22	58	25

**Mladost Doboj Kakanj relegated after failing to obtain a licence for the 2021-22 Premier League*

BULGARIA

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ludogorets (C)	31	22	4	5	69	29	70
Lokomotiv Plovdiv	31	17	10	4	48	23	61
CSKA Sofia	31	17	8	6	46	24	59
Arda	31	13	11	7	42	37	50
CSKA 1948	31	12	11	8	41	34	47
Beroe	31	10	9	12	42	38	39

Europa Conference League Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cherno More	32	12	9	11	37	34	45
Levski Sofia	32	11	8	13	34	32	41
Tsarsko Selo	32	9	10	13	33	39	37
Botev Plovdiv	32	7	11	14	34	52	32

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slavia Sofia	32	9	7	16	28	44	34
Botev Vratsa*	32	8	6	18	31	45	30
Montana (R)	32	6	10	16	26	52	28
Etar (R)	32	6	10	16	26	52	28

**Botev Vratsa won the relegation play-off*

CROATIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo Zagreb (C)	36	26	7	3	84	28	85
Osijek	36	23	8	5	59	25	77
Rijeka	36	18	7	11	51	46	61
Hajduk Split	36	18	6	12	48	37	60
Gorica	36	17	8	11	60	47	59
Sibenik	36	9	8	19	32	47	35
Slaven Belupo	36	7	13	16	36	53	34
Lokomotiva	36	7	9	20	29	60	30
Istra 1961	36	7	8	21	27	52	29
Varazdin (R)	36	6	10	20	30	61	28

CYPRUS

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Omonia (R)	36	23	10	3	55	17	79
Apollon Limassol	36	21	11	4	68	30	74
AEL Limassol	36	21	5	10	58	34	68
Anorthosis Famagusta	36	16	9	11	44	37	57
AEK Larnaca	36	15	5	16	44	40	50
Olympiakos Nicosia	36	14	5	17	38	51	47

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pafos FC	40	18	9	13	58	38	63
APOEL	40	17	9	14	48	39	60
Ethnikos Achna	40	14	10	16	48	56	52
Doxa Katokopias	40	13	12	15	46	43	51
Nea Salamis F. (R)	40	11	10	19	48	61	43
Ermis Aradippou (R)	40	9	11	20	40	61	38
Enosis Neon P. (R)	40	8	10	22	35	61	34
Karmiotissa (R)	40	4	12	24	36	98	24

CZECH REPUBLIC

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slavia Prague (C)	34	26	8	0	85	20	86
Sparta Prague	34	23	5	6	82	43	74
Jablonec	34	21	6	7	59	33	69
Slovacko	34	19	6	9	58	33	63
Viktoria Plzen	34	17	7	10	60	45	58
Slovan Liberec	34	14	10	10	44	32	52
FK Pardubice	34	15	7	12	41	42	52
Banik Ostrava	34	13	10	11	48	38	49
Sigma Olomouc	34	11	12	11	40	40	45
Bohemians 1905	34	10	13	11	40	37	43
Mlada Boleslav	34	10	9	15	49	54	39
Karvina	34	9	12	13	37	49	39
Ceske Budejovice	34	9	11	14	33	47	38
Fastav Zlin	34	8	8	18	30	50	32
Teplice	34	7	9	18	34	66	30
Zbrojovka Brno (R)	34	5	11	18	33	57	26
Pribram (R)	34	5	10	19	26	65	25
Oprava (R)	34	3	8	23	23	71	17

DENMARK

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brondby (C)	32	19	4	9	58	38	61
Midtjylland	32	18	6	8	57	33	60
Copenhagen	32	16	7	9	61	53	55
AGF	32	13	9	10	48	42	48
Nordsjaelland	32	11	10	11	51	51	43
Randers	32	11	7	14	43	38	40

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AaB	32	12	10	10	44	41	46
SonderjyskE	32	13	5	14	45	48	44
OB	32	11	10	11	40	39	43
Vejle	32	9	11	12	42	50	38
Lyngby (R)	32	6	8	18	36	63	26
Horsens (R)	32	5	9	18	30	59	24

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man. City (C)	38	27	5	6	83	32	86
Man. United	38	21	11	6	73	44	74
Liverpool	38	20	9	9	68	42	69
Chelsea	38	19	10	9	58	36	67
Leicester City	38	20	6	12	68	50	66
West Ham	38	19	8	11	62	47	65
Tottenham	38	18	8	12	68	45	62
Arsenal	38	18	7	13	55	39	61
Leeds	38	18	5	15	62	54	59
Everton	38	17	8	13	47	48	59
Aston Villa	38	16	7	15	55	46	55
Newcastle	38	12	9	17	46	62	45
Wolves	38	12	9	17	36	52	45
Crystal Palace	38	12	8	18	41	66	44
Southampton	38	12	7	19	47	68	43
Brighton	38	9	14	15	40	46	41
Burnley	38	10	9	19	33	55	39
Fulham (R)	38	5	13	20	27	53	28
West Brom (R)	38	5	11	22	35	76	26
Sheff. United (R)	38	7	2	29	20	63	23

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lille (C)	38	24	11	3	64	23	83
PSG	38	26	4	8	86	28	82
Monaco	38	24	6	8	76	42	78
Lyon	38	22	10	6	81	43	76
Marseille	38	16	12	10	54	47	60
Rennes	38	16	10	12	52	40	58
Lens	38	15	12	11	55	54	57
Montpellier	38	14	12	12	60	62	54
Nice	38	15	7	16	50	53	52
Metz	38	12	11	15	44	48	47
Saint-Etienne	38	12	10	16	42	54	46
Bordeaux	38	13	6	19	42	56	45
Angers	38	12	8	18	40	58	44
Reims	38	9	15	14	42	50	42
Strasbourg	38	11	9	18	49	58	42
Lorient	38	11	9	18	50	68	42
Brest	38	11	8	19	50	66	41
Nantes*	38	9	13	16	47	55	40
Nimes (R)	38	9	8	21	40	71	35
Dijon (R)	38	4	9	25	25	73	21

**Nantes won the relegation play-off*

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern Munich (C)	34	24	6	4	99	44	78
RB Leipzig	34	19	8	7	60	32	65
B. Dortmund	34	20	4	10	75	46	64
Wolfsburg	34	17	10	7	61	37	61
E. Frankfurt	34	16	12	6	69	53	60
B. Leverkusen	34	14	10	10	53	39	52
Union Berlin	34	12	14	8	50	43	50
B. M'gladbach	34	13	10	11	64	56	49
Stuttgart	34	12	9	13	56	55	45
Freiburg	34	12	9	13	52	52	45
Hoffenheim	34	11	10	13	52	54	43
Mainz	34	10	9	15	39	56	39
Augsburg	34	10	6	18	36	54	36
Hertha Berlin	34	8	11	15	41	52	35
Arminia	34	9	8	17	26	52	35
Cologne*	34	8	9	17	34	60	33
W. Bremen (R)	34	7	10	17	36	57	31
Schalke (R)	34	3	7	24	25	86	16

**Cologne won the relegation play-off*

GIBRALTAR

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lincoln Red Imps (C)	20	15	3	2	62	13	48
Europa	20	15	2	3	66	14	47
St. Joseph's	20	14	3	3	71	20	45
Mons Calpe	20	10	2	8	36	35	32
Lynx	20	8	2	10	36	40	26
Lions Gibraltar	20	4	4	12	13	33	16

Lower Table Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bruno's Magpies	18	10	2	6	46	27	32
Glacis United	18	10	0	8	35	27	30
Manchester 62	18	5	2	11	25	60	17
College 1975	18	2	2	14	23	81	8
Europa Point	18	1	0	17	10	73	3

GREECE

Play-Off Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos (C)	36	28	6	2	82	19	90
PAOK	36	18	10	8	60	34	64
Aris Thessaloniki	36	17	10	9	41	26	61
AEK Athens	36	17	9	10	53	45	60
Panathinaikos	36	14	11	11	41	34	53
Asteras Tripolis	36	12	15	9	36	38	51

Play-Out Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Volos	33	10	13	10	34	37	43
Atromitos	33	8	13	12	30	40	37
PAS Giannina	33	9	8	16	27	36	35

Lamia	33	8	11	14	21	42	35
Apollon Smyrnis	33	9	7	17	29	40	34
OFI	33	8	8	17	30	47	32
Panetolikos	33	6	10	17	20	44	28
AEL (R)	33	6	9	18	25	47	27

Panetolikos won the relegation play-off

HUNGARY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ferencvaros (C)	33	23	9	1	69	22	78
Puskas Akademia	33	18	4	11	52	42	58
Fehervar	33	16	8	9	68	38	56
Paks	33	14	8	11	76	64	50
Kisvarda	33	12	10	11	30	36	46
Ujpest	33	12	6	15	46	67	42
MTK Budapest	33	11	9	13	44	49	42
Mezokovesd	33	11	9	13	40	46	42
Zalaegerszeg	33	10	7	16	58	58	37
Budapest Honved	33	9	10	14	46	48	37
Diosgyor (R)	33	9	6	18	34	53	33
Budafok (R)	33	7	6	20	34	74	27

ISRAEL

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maccabi Haifa (C)	36	24	7	5	72	29	79
Maccabi Tel Aviv	36	21	12	3	65	33	75
Ashdod	36	15	9	12	48	39	54
Hapoel Ble'er Sheva	36	11	15	10	45	43	48
Maccabi Petah Tikva	36	13	7	16	32	38	46
Ironi Kiryat Shmona	36	12	10	14	37	45	46

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maccabi Netanya	33	13	9	11	43	34	48
Hapoel Hadera	33	13	9	11	40	34	48
Hapoel Haifa	33	11	9	13	40	48	42
Beitar Jerusalem	33	10	10	13	40	43	40
Hapoel Tel Aviv	33	9	11	13	24	35	38
Bnei Sakhnin	33	9	7	17	22	45	34
Bnei Yehuda (R)	33	8	9	16	27	46	33
Hapoel Kfar Saba (R)	33	6	6	21	26	49	24

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Internazionale (C)	38	28	7	3	89	35	91
Milan	38	24	7	7	74	41	79
Atalanta	38	23	9	6	90	47	78
Juventus	38	23	9	6	77	38	78
Napoli	38	24	5	9	86	41	77
Lazio	38	21	5	12	61	55	68
Roma	38	18	8	12	68	58	62
Sassuolo	38	17	11	10	64	56	62
Sampdoria	38	15	7	16	52	54	52
Verona	38	11	12	15	46	48	45
Genoa	38	10	12	16	47	58	42
Bologna	38	10	11	17	51	65	41
Fiorentina	38	9	13	16	47	59	40
Udinese	38	10	10	18	42	58	40
Spezia	38	9	12	17	52	72	39
Cagliari	38	9	10	19	43	59	37
Torino	38	7	16	15	50	69	37
Benevento (R)	38	7	12	19	40	75	33
Crotone (R)	38	6	5	27	45	92	23
Parma (R)	38	3	11	24	39	83	20

KOSOVO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Prishtina (C)	36	24	6	6	65	27	78
Drita	36	22	10	4	59	28	76
Ballkani	36	23	5	8	79	43	74
Gjilani	36	12	12	12	37	38	48
Llapi	36	13	4	19	49	56	43
Drenica	36	10	12	14	34	48	42
Feronikeli	36	10	12	14	44	36	42
Trepca '89 (R)*	36	12	6	18	38	54	42
Arberia (R)	36	11	7	18	42	58	40
Besa Peje (R)	36	3	6	27	27	86	15

Trepca '89 lost the relegation play-off

LUXEMBOURG

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fola Esch (C)	30	21	5	4	89	35	68
F91 Dudelange	30	20	6	4	70	29	66
Swift Hesperange	30	19	8	3	72	30	65
Racing FC	30	17	3	10	47	29	54
Progres Niederkorn	30	15	8	7	48	30	53
Differdange 03	30	13	6	11	51	48	45
Wiltz	30	13	5	12	45	42	44
Jeunesse Esch	30	12	7	11	41	43	43
Hostert	30	9	10	11	47	56	37
UNA Strassen	30	9	8	13	44	65	35
Mondorf-les-Bains	30	7	7	16	33	56	28
Rodange 91	30	6	10	14	27	52	28
Victoria Rosport (R)	30	8	3	19	37	67	27
Hamm Benfica (R)	30	5	11	14	33	48	26
Etzella Ettelbruck (R)	30	5	9	16	32	57	24
Union Titus Petange (R)	30	5	6	19	23	52	21

MALTA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hamrun Spartans (C)	23	17	5	1	56	20	56
Hibernians	23	16	3	4	53	20	51
Gzira United	23	14	4	5	49	21	46
Birkirkara	23	13	5	5	45	25	44
Sliema Wanderers	23	12	4	7	39	31	40
Mosta	23	10	6	7	41	36	36
Valletta	23	9	6	8	27	35	33
St. Lucia	23	7	8	8	38	35	29
Sirens	23	7	7	9	27	35	28
Balzan	23	6	9	8	31	29	27
Gudja United	23	8	3	12	29	35	27
Floriana	23	7	6	10	26	34	27
Zejtun Corinthians (R)	23	6	6	11	28	40	24
Tarxien Rainbows (R)	23	6	3	14	25	48	21
Lija Athletic (R)	23	5	5	13	25	46	20
Senglea Athletic (R)	23	0	2	21	13	62	2

MOLDOVA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sheriff Tiraspol (C)	36	32	3	1	116	7	99
Petrocub Hincesti	36	25	8	3	82	18	83
Milsami Orhei	36	22	7	7	71	37	73
Sfintul Gheorghe	36	21	4	11	65	43	67
Dacia Buiucani	36	13	9	14	44	45	48
Dinamo-Auto	36	12	12	12	53	58	48
Floresti	36	9	5	22	37	85	32
Zimbru Chisinau	36	6	7	23	39	63	25
Speranta Nisporeni (E)	36	5	8	23	29	87	23
Codru Lozova (R)	36	2	3	31	26	119	9

MONTENEGRO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Buducnost (C)	36	27	4	5	65	29	85
Sutjeska	36	15	12	9	56	34	57
Decic	36	13	15	8	39	28	54
Podgorica	36	15	7	14	39	38	52
Jezero	36	12	9	15	28	34	45
Zeta	36	13	7	16	34	41	45
Rudar	36	13	6	17	38	50	45
Iskra*	36	9	17	10	28	29	44
Petrovac*	36	7	11	18	29	45	32
OFK Titograd (R)	36	7	10	19	23	51	31

Iskra & Petrovac in relegation play-offs

NETHERLANDS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ajax (C)	34	28	4	2	102	23	88
PSV	34	21	9	4	74	35	72
AZ	34	21	8	5	75	41	71
Vitesse	34	18	7	9	52	38	61
Feyenoord	34	16	11	7	64	36	59
Utrecht	34	13	14	7	52	41	53
Groningen	34	14	8	12	40	37	50
Sparta Rotterdam	34	13	8	13	49	48	47
Heracles Almelo	34	12	8	14	42	53	44
Twente	34	10	11	13	48	50	41
Fortuna Sittard	34	12	5	17	50	58	41
Heerenveen	34	9	12	13	43	49	39
PEC Zwolle	34	9	11	14	44	53	38
Willem II	34	8	7	19	40	68	31
RKC Waalwijk	34	7	9	18	33	55	30
Emmen (R)*	34	7	9	18	40	68	30
VVV-Venlo (R)	34	6	5	23	43	91	23
ADO Den Haag (R)	34	4	10	20	29	76	22

Emmen lost in the relegation play-offs

NORTH MACEDONIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shkendija (C)	33	22	9	2	69	26	75
Shkupi	33	16	11	6	41	24	59
Struga	33	15	12	6	39	24	57
Makedonija GP	33	16	7	10	53	43	55
Rabotnicki	33	11	15	7	45	39	48
Pelister	33	12	9	12	34	38	45
Akademija Pandev	33	12	5	16	32	36	41
Borec	33	11	7	15	32	36	40
Sileks (R)*	33	10	6	17	49	45	36
Renova**	33	8	12	13	36	46	36
Vardar (R)	33	7	10	16	32	60	31
Belasica (R)	33	4	5	24	23	68	17

Sileks lost in the relegation play-offs
**Renova won in the relegation play-offs*

NORTHERN IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Linfield (C)	38	24	6	8	83	38	78
Coleraine	38	21	10	7	57	35	73
Glentoran	38	20	11	7	65	32	71
Larne	38	18	10	10	64	41	64
Cliftonville	38	17	9	12	59	42	60
Crusaders	38	16	6	16	62	50	54
Glenavon	38	17	11	10	72	65	62
Ballymena United	38	18	7	13	67	44	61
Portadown	38	10	6	22	50	78	36
Warrenpoint Town	38	9	9	20	38	74	36
Carrick Rangers	38	5	8	25	35	92	23
Dungannon Swifts	38	4	5	29	22	83	17

POLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Legia Warsaw (C)	30	19	7	4	48	24	64
Rakow Czestochowa	30	17	8	5	46	25	59
Pogon Szczecin	30	15	7	8	36	23	52
Slask Wroclaw	30	11	10	9	36	32	43
Warta Poznan	30	13	4	13	33	32	43
Piast Gliwice	30	11	9	10	39	32	42
Lechia Gdansk	30	12	6	12	40	37	42
Zaglebie Lubin	30	11	8	11	38	40	41
Jagiellonia Bialystok	30	10	7	13	39	48	37
Gornik Zabrze	30	10	7	13	31	33	37
Lech Poznan	30	9	10	11	39	38	37
Wisla Plock	30	8	9	13	37	44	33
Wisla Krakow	30	8	9	13	39	42	33
Cracovia	30	8	13	9	28	32	32
Stal Mielec	30	6	11	13	31	47	29
Podbeskidzie Bielsko-Biala (R)	30	6	7	17	29	60	25

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sporting (C)	34	26	7	1	65	20	85
Porto	34	24	8	2	74	29	80
Benfica	34	23	7	4	69	27	76
Braga	34	19	7	8	53	33	64
Pacos de Ferreira	34	15	8	11	40	41	53
Santa Clara	34	13	7	14	44	36	46
Vitoria de Guimaraes	34	12	7	15	37	44	43
Moreirense	34	10	13	11	37	43	43
Famalicao	34	10	10	14	40	48	40
Belenenses SAD	34	9	13	12	25	35	40
Gil Vicente	34	11	6	17	33	42	39
Tondela	34	10	6	18	36	57	36
Boavista	34	8	12	14	39	49	36
Portimonense	34	9	8	17	34	41	35
Maritimo	34	10	5	19	27	47	35
Rio Ave (R)*	34	7	13	14	25	40	34
Farense (R)	34	7	10	17	31	48	31
Nacional (R)	34	6	7	21	30	59	25

Rio Ave lost the relegation play-off

ROMANIA

Play-Off Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CFR Cluj (C)	10	7	1	2	15	5	54
FCSB	10	3	3	4	13	14	45
Universitatea Craiova	10	3	3	4	9	11	41
Sepsi	10	5	2	3	11	8	40
Academica Clinceni	10	3	2	5	10	15	33
Botosani	10	3	1	6	13	18	31

Play-Out Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chindia Targoviste	9	4	4	1	7	3	36
UTA Arad	9	**4**	**1**	**4**	**7**	**9**	**32**
Gaz Metan Medias	9	4	3	2	15	10	32
Viitorul Constanta	9	**5**	**1**	**3**	**9**	**4**	**32**
Arges	9	3	2	4	10	7	31
Dinamo Bucharest	9	**5**	**2**	**2**	**11**	**8**	**31**
Voluntari*	9	3	3	3	6	7	28
Hermannstadt*	9	**4**	**1**	**4**	**6**	**9**	**26**
Astra Giurgiu (R)	9	1	2	6	6	12	24
Politehnica Iasi (R)	9	**2**	**1**	**6**	**7**	**15**	**20**

Voluntari & Hermannstadt in relegation play-offs

RUSSIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit (C)	30	19	8	3	76	26	65
Spartak Moscow	30	17	6	7	56	37	57
Lokomotiv Moscow	30	17	5	8	45	35	56
Rubin Kazan	30	16	5	9	42	33	53
Sochi	30	15	8	7	49	33	53
CSKA Moscow	30	15	5	10	51	33	50
Dynamo Moscow	30	15	5	10	44	33	50
Khimki	30	13	6	11	35	39	45
Rostov	30	13	4	13	37	35	43
Krasnodar	30	12	5	13	52	45	41
Akhmat Grozny	30	11	7	12	36	38	40
Ural Yekaterinburg	30	7	13	10	26	36	34
Ufa	30	6	7	17	26	46	25
Arsenal Tula	30	6	5	19	28	51	23
Rotor Volgograd (R)	30	5	7	18	15	52	22
Tambov (D)	30	3	4	23	19	65	13

SAN MARINO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
La Fiorita	14	12	1	1	34	5	37
Libertas	14	9	2	3	21	11	29
Folgore (C)*	14	8	3	3	25	10	27
Tre Penne	14	9	0	5	30	20	27
Tre Fiori	14	7	5	2	26	11	26
Pennarossa	14	6	3	5	15	15	21
San Giovanni	14	5	4	5	17	20	19
Juvenes/Dogana	14	6	1	7	23	34	19
Murata	14	4	6	4	14	9	18
Virtus	14	4	6	4	14	12	18
Fiorentino	14	4	4	6	18	26	16
Domagnano	14	2	6	6	16	26	12
Faetano	14	2	4	8	14	26	10
Cailungo	14	2	2	10	17	29	8
Cosmos	14	1	1	12	10	40	4

Folgore crowned champions after winning the second phase play-off round

SCOTLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rangers (C)	38	32	6	0	92	13	102
Celtic	38	22	11	5	78	29	77
Hibernian	38	18	9	11	48	35	63
Aberdeen	38	15	11	12	36	38	56
St Johnstone	38	11	12	15	36	46	45
Livingston	38	12	9	17	42	54	45
St Mirren	38	11	12	15	37	45	45
Motherwell	38	12	9	17	39	55	45
Dundee United	38	10	14	14	32	50	44
Ross County	38	11	6	21	35	66	39
Kilmarnock (R)*	38	10	6	22	43	54	36
Hamilton Academical (R)	38	7	9	22	34	67	30

Kilmarnock lost the relegation play-off

SERBIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Red Star Belgrade (C)	38	35	3	0	114	20	108
Partizan	38	31	2	5	95	20	95
Cukaricki	38	22	8	8	69	34	74
Vojvodina	38	21	8	9	62	41	71
TSC Backa Topola	38	17	7	14	68	50	58
Radnik Surdulica	38	16	7	15	55	49	55
Mladost Lucani	38	15	9	14	43	59	54
Proleter Novi Sad	38	15	8	15	40	47	53
Spartak Subotica	38	15	7	16	54	53	52
Metalac G.M.	38	13	13	12	48	53	52
Napredak Krusevac	38	14	8	16	44	51	50
Radnicki Nis	38	13	10	15	37	39	49
Novi Pazar	38	14	7	17	50	60	49
Vozdovac	38	13	9	16	49	59	48
Rad (R)	38	14	6	18	44	57	48
Javor-Matis (R)	38	12	10	16	45	53	46
Indija (R)	38	10	5	23	29	66	35
Zlatibor (R)	38	7	8	23	28	64	29
Macva Sabac (R)	38	7	4	27	26	81	25
Backa (R)	38	3	7	28	24	68	16

SLOVAKIA

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovan Bratislava (C)	32	22	5	5	78	28	71
DAC	32	19	8	5	66	38	65
Spartak Trnava	32	17	4	11	48	37	55
Zilina	32	15	7	10	73	52	52
Zlate Moravce	32	11	7	14	42	51	40
Trencin	32	8	8	16	42	61	32

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sered	32	11	8	13	37	48	41
Ruzomberok	32	10	9	13	41	44	39
Pohronie	32	8	14	10	38	38	38
Zemplin Michalovce	32	8	11	13	34	53	35
Senica*	32	8	9	15	31	51	33
Nitra (R)	32	7	6	19	26	55	27

Senica won the relegation play-off

SLOVENIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mura (C)	36	17	12	7	50	26	63
Maribor	36	17	12	7	64	41	63
Olimpija Ljubljana	36	16	11	9	45	35	59
Domzale	36	14	13	9	52	41	55
Bravo	36	10	15	11	39	39	45
Tabor Sezana	36	12	8	16	40	44	44
Aluminij	36	10	13	13	31	41	43
Celje	36	12	7	17	36	41	43
Koper*	36	11	9	16	41	56	42
Gorica (R)	36	7	8	21	24	58	29

Koper won the relegation play-off

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atletico Madrid (C)	38	26	8	4	67	25	86
Real Madrid	38	25	9	4	67	28	84
Barcelona	38	24	7	7	85	38	79
Sevilla	38	24	5	9	53	33	77
Real Sociedad	38	17	11	10	59	38	62
Real Betis	38	17	10	11	50	50	61
Villarreal	38	15	13	10	60	44	58

Celta Vigo	38	14	11	13	55	57	53
Granada	38	13	7	18	47	65	46
Athletic Bilbao	38	11	13	14	46	42	46
Osasuna	38	11	11	16	37	48	44
Cadiz	38	11	11	16	36	58	44
Valencia	38	10	13	15	50	53	43
Levante	38	9	14	15	46	57	41
Getafe	38	9	11	18	28	43	38
Alaves	38	9	11	18	36	57	38
Elche	38	8	12	18	34	55	36
Huesca (R)	38	7	13	18	34	53	34
Valladolid (R)	38	5	16	17	34	57	31
Eibar (R)	38	6	12	20	29	52	30

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Young Boys (C)	36	25	9	2	74	29	84
Basle	36	15	8	13	60	53	53
Servette	36	14	8	14	45	56	50
Lugano	36	12	13	11	40	42	49
Luzern	36	12	10	14	62	59	46
Lausanne-Sport	36	12	10	14	52	55	46
St. Gallen	36	11	11	14	45	48	44
Zurich	36	11	10	15	53	57	43
Sion*	36	8	14	14	48	58	38
Vaduz (R)	36	9	9	18	36	58	36

*Sion won the relegation play-off

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Besiktas (C)	40	26	6	8	89	44	84
Galatasaray	40	26	6	8	80	36	84
Fenerbahce	40	25	7	8	72	41	82
Trabzonspor	40	19	14	7	50	37	71
Sivasspor	40	16	17	7	54	43	65
Hatayspor	40	17	10	13	62	53	61
Alanyaspor	40	17	9	14	58	45	60
Fatih Karagumruk	40	16	12	12	64	52	60
Gaziantep	40	15	13	12	59	51	58
Goztepe	40	13	12	15	59	59	51
Konyaspor	40	12	14	14	49	48	50
Istanbul Basaksehir	40	12	12	16	43	55	48
Caykur Rizespor	40	12	12	16	53	69	48
Kasimpasa	40	12	10	18	47	57	46
Yeni Malatyaspor	40	10	15	15	49	53	45
Antalyaspor	40	9	17	14	41	55	44
Kayerispor	40	9	14	17	35	52	41
BB Erzurumspor (R)	40	10	10	20	44	68	40
Ankaragucu (R)	40	10	8	22	46	65	38
Genclerbirligi (R)	40	10	8	22	44	76	38
Denizlispor (R)	40	6	10	24	38	77	28

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo Kiev (C)	26	20	5	1	59	15	65
Shakhtar Donetsk	26	16	6	4	54	19	54
Zorya Luhansk	26	15	5	6	44	22	50
Kolos Kovalivka	26	10	11	5	36	26	41
Vorskla Poltava	26	11	8	7	37	30	41
Desna Chernihiv	26	10	8	8	38	32	38
SC Dnipro-1	26	8	6	12	36	38	30
FC Lviv	26	8	5	13	25	51	29
FC Oleksandriya	26	8	5	13	33	37	29
Rukh Lviv	26	6	10	10	27	39	28
FC Mariupol	26	6	8	12	27	41	26
Inhulets Petrove	26	5	11	10	24	39	26
Olimpik Donetsk	26	6	4	16	28	48	22
FC Mynai (R)	26	4	6	16	16	47	18

WALES

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Connah's Quay Nomads (C)	32	25	4	3	70	20	79
The New Saints	32	24	5	3	84	17	77
Bala Town	32	18	6	8	67	42	60
Penybont	32	13	7	12	42	40	46
Barry Town United	32	13	4	15	42	53	43
Caernarfon Town	32	10	7	15	43	67	37
Newtown	32	12	6	14	57	53	42
Cardiff Metropolitan University	32	11	7	14	49	45	40
Haverfordwest County	32	10	7	15	38	56	37
Aberystwyth Town	32	8	9	15	47	53	33
Flint Town United	32	10	2	20	38	58	32
Cefn Druids	32	4	4	24	25	95	16

SOUTH AMERICA

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Group Stage

Group A

Apr 22 - Quito
Independiente del Valle 1 (Ortiz 28)
Defensa y Justicia 1 (Rotondi 7)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Vivar (Par)

Apr 22 - Lima
Universitario 2 (Gutierrez 65, 68 pen)
Palmeiras 3 (Danilo 20, Veiga 52, Renan 90+5)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ferreyra (Uru)

Apr 28 - Sao Paulo
Palmeiras 5 (Rony 11, 74, Adriano 20, Patrick 65, Danilo 81)
Independiente del Valle 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Tobar (Chi)

Apr 28 - Florencio Varela
Defensa y Justicia 3 (Pizzini 33, Bou 71, 80 pen)
Universitario 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Hermosilla (Chi)

May 5 - Florencio Varela
Defensa y Justicia 1 (Tripichio 68)
Palmeiras 2 (Rony 47, 56)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

May 5 - Quito
Independiente del Valle 4 (Sanchez 45+3, 73, Murillo 61, Ortiz 85)
Universitario 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Cunha (Uru)

May 12 - Quito
Independiente del Valle 0
Palmeiras 1 (Veiga 43 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)

May 13 - Lima
Universitario 1 (Quintero 45+5)
Defensa y Justicia 1 (Romero 53)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Gallo (Col)

May 18 - Sao Paulo
Palmeiras 3 (Rafael 11, Willian 35, Scarpa 75)
Defensa y Justicia 4 (Bou 9, 27, Rodriguez 52, Romero 90+4)
HT: 2-2. **Ref:** Cunha (Uru)

May 19 - Lima
Universitario 3 (Valera 20, 48, Quina 72)
Independiente del Valle 2 (Sanchez 8, Ortiz 59)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Maza (Chi)

May 27 - Sao Paulo
Palmeiras 6 (Vina 42, Rafael 45+2, Gomez 55, Willian 60, Rony 77, 90)
Universitario 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Garay (Chi)

May 27 - Florencio Varela
Defensa y Justicia 1 (Romero 36)
Independiente del Valle 1 (Escobar 11)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Alves (Bra)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palmeiras	6	5	0	1	20	7	15
Defensa y Justicia	6	2	3	1	11	8	9
Independiente del Valle	6	1	2	3	8	11	5
Universitario	6	1	1	4	6	19	4

Group B

Apr 20 - La Paz
Always Ready 2 (Saucedo 53, Algaranaz 90+5)
Internacional 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Gallo (Col)

Apr 20 - San Cristobal
Deportivo Tachira 3 (Gomez 16, Gondola 57, Trejo 80)
Olimpia 2 (Sosa 14, Torres 76)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ostojich (Uru)

Apr 28 - Porto Alegre
Internacional 4 (Cuesta 20, Patrick 24, Galhardo 43, Alberto 75)
Deportivo Tachira 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Matonte (Uru)

Apr 29 - Asuncion
Olimpia 2 (Santa Cruz 71, Ortiz 80)
Always Ready 1 (Polenta 64 og)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lamolina (Arg)

May 6 - Porto Alegre
Internacional 6 (Cuesta 29, Edenilson 52 pen, Galhardo 64, 71, Alberto 77, Caio 80)
Olimpia 1 (Gonzalez 86 pen)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Tello (Arg)

May 6 - La Paz
Always Ready 2 (Ovejero 24, Mosquera 82 pen)
Deportivo Tachira 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Matonte (Uru)

May 11 - San Cristobal
Deportivo Tachira 2 (Hernandez 77, Cova 86 pen)
Internacional 1 (Galhardo 52 pen)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

May 14 - La Paz
Always Ready 1 (Ramallo 42)
Olimpia 2 (Gonzalez 23, Silva 90+3)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Herrera (Arg)

May 20 - San Cristobal
Deportivo Tachira 7 (Gondola 12, 46, Cova 24 pen, Chacon 37, Gomez 44, Covea 61, Angarita 74)
Always Ready 2 (Viera 55, Mosquera 68 pen)
HT: 4-0. **Ref:** Ospina (Col)

May 21 - Asuncion
Olimpia 0
Internacional 1 (Alberto 83)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)

May 26 - Asuncion
Olimpia 6 (Ortiz 25, 82, Quintana 31, Gonzalez 56 pen, Pitta 69, Varela 71 og)
Deportivo Tachira 2 (Trejo 61, Angarita 76))
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Haro (Per)

May 26 - Porto Alegre
Internacional 0
Always Ready 0
HT: 0-0 **Ref:** Loustau (Arg)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Internacional	6	3	1	2	12	5	10
Olimpia	6	3	0	3	13	14	9
Deportivo Tachira	6	3	0	3	14	17	9
Always Ready	6	2	1	3	8	11	7

Group C

Apr 20 - Santos
Santos 0
Barcelona 2 (Garces 53, Para 69 og)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Matonte (Uru)

Apr 21 - La Paz
The Strongest 0
Boca Juniors 1 (Villa 7)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ospina (Col)

Apr 28 - Buenos Aires
Boca Juniors 2 (Tevez 47, Villa 69)
Santos 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)

Apr 29 - Guayaquil
Barcelona 4 (Garces 46, Pineida 67, Martinez 73, Valverde 86 og)
The Strongest 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lopez (Par)

May 4 - Santos
Santos 5 (Marinho 1, Pirani 26, Vinicius 43, Braga 59, Malthus 83)
The Strongest 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Garay (Chi)

May 5 - Guayaquil
Barcelona 1 (Garces 62)
Boca Juniors 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Rojas (Col)

May 11 - La Paz
The Strongest 2 (Reinoso 45+1, 65)
Barcelona 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Arteaga (Ven)

May 11 - Santos
Santos 1 (Jonatan 41)
Boca Juniors 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ferreyra (Uru)

May18 - La Paz
The Strongest 2 (Reinoso 16, Willie 23)
Santos 1 (Jonatan 64)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Haro (Per)

May 21 - Buenos Aires
Boca Juniors 0
Barcelona 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

May 27 - Buenos Aires
Boca Juniors 3 (Almendra 3, Villa 44, Valverde 56 og)
The Strongest 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Tobar (Chi)

May 27 - Guayaquil
Barcelona 3 (Diaz 15, 54, Montano 77)
Santos 1 (Kaio Jorge 45+2)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Rojas (Col)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	6	4	1	1	10	3	13
Boca Juniors	6	3	1	2	6	2	10
Santos	6	2	0	4	8	9	6
The Strongest	6	2	0	4	4	14	6

Group D

Apr 22 - Rio de Janeiro
Fluminense 1 (Fred 66)
River Plate 1 (Montiel 13 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Tobar (Chi)

Apr 23 - Barranquilla
Junior 1 (Hinestroza 31)
Santa Fe 1 (Osorio 35 pen)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)

Apr 29 - Armenia
Santa Fe 1 (Giraldo 51)
Fluminense 2 (Fred 4, 46)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Cunha (Uru)

Apr 29 - Buenos Aires
River Plate 2 (Martinez 29, Alvarez 55)
Junior 1 (Borja 90+4)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Benitez (Par)

May 7 - Asuncion
Santa Fe 0
River Plate 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Herrera (Ven)

May 7 - Guayaquil
Junior 1 (Borja 11 pen)
Fluminense 1 (Kayky 20)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Bascunan (Chi)

May 13 - Rio de Janeiro
Fluminense 2 (Fred 60, Caio 77)
Santa Fe 1 (Gonzalez 58)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Aquino (Par)

May 13 - Barranquilla
Junior 1 (Borja 20)
River Plate 1 (Diaz 90+2)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ostojich (Uru)

May 19 - Rio de Janeiro
Fluminense 1 (Hernandez 75)
Junior 2 (Valencia 35, Cetre 50)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Tobar (Chi)

May 20 - Buenos Aires
River Plate 2 (Angileri 3, Alvarez 6)
Santa Fe 1 (Osorio 73)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)

May 25 - Buenos Aires
River Plate 1 (Girotti 85)
Fluminense 3 (Caio 22, Nene 29, Felipe 90+2)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Ostojich (Uru)

May 25 - Bogota
Santa Fe 0
Junior 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Cunha (Uru)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fluminense	6	3	2	1	10	7	11
River Plate	6	2	3	1	7	7	9
Junior	6	1	4	1	6	6	7
Santa Fe	6	0	3	3	4	7	3

Group E

Apr 21 - Lima
Sporting Cristal 0
Sao Paulo 3 (Luan 17, Benitez 60, Eder 81)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Cunha (Uru)

Apr 22 - Montevideo
Rentistas 1 (Rodriguez 42)
Racing 1 (Caceres 89)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Benitez (Par)

Apr 29 - Avellaneda
Racing 2 (Caceres 13, Chancalay 83)
Sporting Cristal 1 (Gonzales 52)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Arteaga (Ven)

Apr 30 - Sao Paulo
Sao Paulo 2 (Pablo 38, Reinaldo 90 pen)
Rentistas 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Gamboa (Chi)

May 5 - Avellaneda
Racing 0
Sao Paulo 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Maza (Chi)

May 6 - Montevideo
Rentistas 0
Sporting Cristal 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Herrera (Col)

May 12 - Lima
Sporting Cristal 0
Racing 2 (Chancalay 74, Piatti 76)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ospina (Col)

May 12 - Montevideo
Rentistas 1 (Gonzalez 13)
Sao Paulo 1 (Orejuela 4)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Argote (Ven)

May 19 - Sao Paulo
Sao Paulo 0
Racing 1 (Novillo 28)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)

May 19 - Lima
Sporting Cristal 2 (Hohberg 41, Tavara 67)
Rentistas 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Congo (Ecu)

May 26 - Sao Paulo
Sao Paulo 3 (Alves 25, Rojas 68, Bueno 70)
Sporting Cristal 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

May 26 - Avellaneda
Racing 3 (Chancalay 14, 50, 69)
Rentistas 0
HT: 1-0 **Ref:** Gamboa (Chi)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Racing	6	4	2	0	9	2	14
Sao Paulo	6	3	2	1	9	2	11
Sporting Cristal	6	1	1	4	3	10	4
Rentistas	6	0	3	3	2	9	3

Group F

Apr 20 - Buenos Aires
Argentinos Juniors 2 (Avalos 25, Herrera 88)
Nacional 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)

Apr 23 - Pereira
Atletico Nacional 2 (Andrade 39, Duque 45)
Universidad Catolica 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Herrera (Ven)

Apr 28 - Montevideo
Nacional 4 (Bergessio 12, 51, 64, Fernandez 45+4)
Atletico Nacional 4 (Barrera 8, 85, Andrade 45+2, Orihuela 74 og)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Aragon (Ecu)

Apr 29 - Santiago
Universidad Catolica 0
Argentinos Juniors 2 (Florentin 23, Hauche 51)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Vargas (Bol)

May 6 - Santiago
Universidad Catolica 3 (Zampedri 30 pen, Valencia 59, Montes 90+3)
Nacional 1 (Fernandez 45+1)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Daronco (Bra)

May 6 - Asuncion
Atletico Nacional 0
Argentinos Juniors 2 (Avalos 18, 80)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)

May 12 - Buenos Aires
Argentinos Juniors 0
Universidad Catolica 1 (Zampedri 74)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Sampaio (Bra)

May 13 - Pereira
Atletico Nacional 0
Nacional 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Haro (Per)

May 18 - Montevideo
Nacional 1 (Ocampo 29)
Universidad Catolica 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Claus (Bra)

May 20 - Buenos Aires
Argentinos Juniors 1 (Herrera 90)
Atletico Nacional 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Arleu (Bra)

May 27 - Montevideo
Nacional 2 (Bergessio 73, Ocampo 84)
Argentinos Juniors 0
HT: 0-0 **Ref:** Aquino (Par)

May 27 - Santiago
Universidad Catolica 2 (Aued 9, Valencia 79)
Atletico Nacional 0
HT: 1-0 **Ref:** Sampaio (Bra)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Argentinos Juniors	6	4	0	2	7	3	12
Universidad Catolica	6	3	0	3	6	6	9
Nacional	6	2	2	2	8	9	8
Atletico Nacional	6	1	2	3	6	9	5

Group G

Apr 21 - Buenos Aires
Velez Sarsfield 2 (Janson 21, 54)
Flamengo 3 (Arao 43, Barbosa 62 pen, Arrascaeta 80)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

Apr 22 - La Calera
Union La Calera 2 (Vilches 18, 70)
LDU Quito 2 (Arce 51, 83)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Vargas (Bol)

Apr 27 - Quito
LDU Quito 3 (Borja 28, 53, Zunino 64)
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Galdames 42)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Haro (Per)

Apr 27 - Rio de Janeiro
Flamengo 4 (Barbosa 31, 79, Arrascaeta 34, Pedro 85)
Union La Calera 1 (Saez 57)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Argote (Ven)

May 4 - La Calera
Union La Calera 0
Velez Sarsfield 2 (Bouzat 38, Orellano 90+5)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ortega (Per)

May 5 - Quito
LDU Quito 2 (Borja 50, Amarilla 61)
Flamengo 3 (Barbosa 3, 85 pen, Henrique 30)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Ostojich (Uru)

May 12 - La Calera
Union La Calera 2 (Martinez 8, Arao 27 og)
Flamengo 2 (Barbosa 31 pen, Arao 77)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Rojas (Col)

May 13 - Buenos Aires
Velez Sarsfield 3 (Almada 45, Janson 69, Mancuello 90+3)
LDU Quito 1 (Zunino 78)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Matonte (Uru)

May 19 - Buenos Aires
Velez Sarsfield 2 (Tarragona 2, Almada 39)
Union La Calera 1 (Vargas 5)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Lopez (Par)

May 20 - Rio de Janeiro
Flamengo 2 (Pedro 32, Henrique 88)
LDU Quito 2 (Guerra 35, Julio 60)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Herrera (Ven)

May 28 - Rio de Janeiro
Flamengo 0
Velez Sarsfield 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Gonzalez (Uru)

May 28 - Quito
LDU Quito 5 (Fernandez 15 og, Amarilla 28, 33, Arce 58, 60)
Union La Calera 2 (Saez 54, 90+2)
HT: 3-0 **Ref:** Betancur (Col)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Flamengo	6	3	3	0	14	9	12
Velez Sarsfield	6	3	1	2	10	8	10
LDU Quito	6	2	2	2	15	13	8
Union La Calera	6	0	2	4	8	17	2

Group H

Apr 21 - Caracas
Deportivo La Guaira 1 (Martinez 20)
Atletico Mineiro 1 (Zaracho 65)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Tello (Arg)

Apr 22 - Bucaramanga
America de Cali 0
Cerro Porteno 2 (Morales 29, Cardozo 90)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Echenique (Arg)

Apr 27 - Belo Horizonte
Atletico Mineiro 2 (Hulk 59 pen, 63)
America de Cali 1 (Sanchez 77)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Fedorczuk (Uru)

Apr 28 - Asuncion
Cerro Porteno 0
Deportivo La Guaira 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Herrera (Arg)

May 4 - Belo Horizonte
Atletico Mineiro 4 (Hulk 9, 45+1, Savarino 73, Vargas 90+2)
Cerro Porteno 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)

May 7 - Caracas
Deportivo La Guaira 0
America de Cali 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Merlos (Arg)

May 13 - Caracas
Deportivo La Guaira 0
Cerro Porteno 1 (Aquino 28 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Tello (Arg)

May 14 - Bucaramanga
America de Cali 1 (Moreno 24)
Atletico Mineiro 3 (Hulk 21, Arana 54, Vargas 90+7)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Cunha (Uru)

May 20 - Asuncion
Cerro Porteno 0
Atletico Mineiro 1 (Keno 90+2)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ostojich (Uru)

May 20 - Bucaramanga
America de Cali 3 (Ramos 21 pen, 72, Moreno 55)
Deportivo La Guaira 1 (Ortiz 30)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Herrera (Arg)

May 26 - Asuncion
Cerro Porteno 1 (Gimenez 5)
America de Cali 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)

May 26 - Belo Horizonte
Atletico Mineiro 4 (Savarino 28, Marrony 44, Hulk 50, Nathan 90+4)
Deportivo La Guaira 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Lamolina (Arg)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atletico Mineiro	6	5	1	0	15	3	16
Cerro Porteno	6	3	1	2	4	5	10
America de Cali	6	1	1	4	5	9	4
Deportivo La Guaira	6	0	0	3	2	9	3

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2021

Group Stage (West)

Group A

Apr 15 - Riyadh
Istiklol 0
Shabab Al-Ahli 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Perera (Sri)

Apr 15 - Riyadh
Al-Hilal 2 (Rakhmanov 27 og, Vietto 36)
AGMK 2 (Polvonov 11, Shaakhmedov 70)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Sato (Jpn)

Apr 18 - Riyadh
Shabab Al-Ahli 0
Al-Hilal 2 (Gomis 14, Carrillo 28)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Qasim (Irq)

Apr 18 - Riyadh
AGMK 2 (Polvonov 57, 90)
Istiklol 3 (Dokic 45+1 og, Dzhalilov 55, Rakhimov 80)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Yaacob (Mas)

Apr 21 - Riyadh
Al-Hilal 3 (Al Bulaihi 39, Bahebri 52, 64)
Istiklol 1 (Hanonov 41)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Tufayelieh (Syr)

Apr 21 - Riyadh
AGMK 2 (Dokic 87, Komilov 90+1)
Shabab Al-Ahli 1 (Al Attas 28)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Abdulnabi (Bhr)

Apr 24 - Riyadh
Istiklol 4 (Dzhalilov 39, 44, Safarov 49, 53)
Al-Hilal 1 (Gomis 24)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Al-Yaqoubi (Oma)

Apr 24 - Riyadh
Shabab Al-Ahli 3 (Abdullah 3, Eduardo 11, Attas 30)
AGMK 1 (Gadoyev 14)
HT: 3-1. **Ref:** Sabah (Irq)

Apr 27 - Riyadh
Shabab Al-Ahli 0
Istiklol 1 (Dzhalilov 90+6)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Yaacob (Mas)

Apr 27 - Riyadh
AGMK 0
Al-Hilal 3 (Vietto 39, Gomis 47, Al-Shahrani 58)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Perera (Sri)

Apr 30 - Riyadh
Istiklol 1 (Soirov 87)
AGMK 2 (Polvonov 67, Dokic 79)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Qasim (Irq)

Apr 30 - Riyadh
Al-Hilal 0
Shabab Al-Ahli 2 (Jesus 54 pen, 90)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Abdulnabi (Bhr)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Istiklol	6	3	1	2	10	8	10
Al-Hilal	6	3	1	2	11	9	10
Shabab Al-Ahli	6	2	1	3	6	6	7
AGMK	6	2	1	3	9	13	7

Group B

Apr 14 - Sharjah
Pakhtakor 3 (Ceran 69, Mukhiddinov 75, Erkinov 82)
Tractor 3 (Dejagah 53, Abbaszadeh 56, 85 pen)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Iida (Jpn)

Apr 14 - Sharjah
Sharjah 1 (Ba Wazir 62)
Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Shukralla (Bhr)

Apr 17 - Sharjah
Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya 0
Pakhtakor 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Yehia (Lbn)

Apr 17 - Sharjah
Tractor 0
Sharjah 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ning (Chn)

Apr 20 - Sharjah
Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya 0
Tractor 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al-Kaf (Oma)

Apr 20 - Sharjah
Sharjah 4 (Ba Wazir 10, Saleh 26, Caio 58, Luanzinho 62)
Pakhtakor 1 (Ceran 21)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Iida (Jpn)

Apr 23 - Sharjah
Tractor 1 (Tikdari 2)
Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Iida (Jpn)

Apr 23 - Sharjah
Pakhtakor 1 (Derdiyok 59)
Sharjah 1 (Khalfan 87)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ming (Chn)

Apr 26 - Sharjah
Tractor 0
Pakhtakor 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Yehia (Lbn)

Apr 26 - Sharjah
Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya 2 (Collazos 15, 52)
Sharjah 3 (Ba Wazir 25, Saleh 35, 60)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Al-Kaf (Oma)

Apr 29 - Sharjah
Pakhtakor 1 (Kholdorkhonov 79)
Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Shukralla (Bhr)

Apr 29 - Sharjah
Sharjah 0
Tractor 2 (Abbaszadeh 7, 66)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Iida (Jpn)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sharjah	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
Tractor	6	2	4	0	6	3	10
Pakhtakor	6	1	4	1	6	8	7
Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya	6	0	2	4	2	6	2

Group C

Apr 15 - Jeddah
Al-Duhail 2 (Oliveira 36, Edmilson 53)
Al-Shorta 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Taqi (Sin)

Apr 15 - Jeddah
Esteghlal 5 (Esmaeili 5, Naderi 54, Ghayedi 67, 86, Diabate 89)
Al-Ahli 2 (Al Somah 27, 79)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Al-Ali (Jor)

Apr 18 - Jeddah
Al-Ahli 1 (Al Somah 90+1)
Al-Duhail 1 (Olunga 53)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Pu-udom (Tha)

Apr 18 - Jeddah
Al-Shorta 0
Esteghlal 3 (Naderi 44, Esmaeili 55, Diabate 65)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Gamini (Sri)

Apr 21 - Jeddah
Al-Duhail 4 (Olunga 10, 27, 85, Al-Ahrak 43)
Esteghlal 3 (Motahari 4, Diabate 34, Esmaeili 74)
HT: 3-2. **Ref:** Al-Ali (Jor)

Apr 21 - Jeddah
Al-Shorta 0
Al-Ahli 3 (Hassoun 22, Fettouhi 37, Ghareeb 90+4)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Taqi (Sin)

Apr 24 - Jeddah
Al-Ahli 2 (Al Somah 5, Ghareeb 79)
Al-Shorta 1 (Youssef 26)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Pu-udom (Tha)

Apr 24 - Jeddah
Esteghlal 2 (Diabate 27 pen, Ghayedi 61)
Al-Duhail 2 (Olunga 45+3 pen, 59)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Taqi (Sin)

Apr 27 - Jeddah
Al-Shorta 2 (Attwan 3, Dawood 85)
Al-Duhail 1 (Olunga 57)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al-Yaqoubi (Oma)

Apr 27 - Jeddah
Al-Ahli 0
Esteghlal 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Sato (Jpn)

Apr 30 - Jeddah
Esteghlal 1 (Diabate 14 pen)
Al-Shorta 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pu-udom (Tha)

Apr 30 - Jeddah
Al-Duhail 1 (Olunga 61)
Al-Ahli 1 (Asiri 73)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Perera (Sri)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Esteghlal	6	3	2	1	14	8	11
Al-Duhail	6	2	3	1	11	9	9
Al-Ahli	6	2	3	1	9	8	9
Al-Shorta	6	1	0	5	3	12	3

Group D

Apr 14 - Riyadh
Al-Wehdat 0
Al-Nassr 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al-Yaqoubi (Oma)

Apr 14 - Riyadh
Al-Sadd 1 (Abdurisag 89)
Foolad 1 (Chimba 61)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Tufayelieh (Syr)

Apr 17 - Riyadh
Al-Nassr 3 (Hamdallah 37, Al-Sulayhem 79, Al-Ghannam 90+4)
Al-Sadd 1 (Cazorla 59)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Sabah (Irq)

Apr 17 - Riyadh
Foolad 1 (Chimba 44 pen)
Al-Wehdat 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Shaban (Kuw)

Apr 20 - Riyadh
Al-Sadd 3 (Bounedjah 2, Khoukhi 9, Al-Haydos 26)
Al-Wehdat 1 (Samir 63 pen)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Perera (Sri)

Apr 20 - Riyadh
Foolad 1 (Al-Amri 52 og)
Al-Nassr 1 (Petros 69)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Sato (Jpn)

Apr 23 - Riyadh
Al-Wehdat 0
Al-Sadd 2 (Cazorla 13 pen, Assadalla 89)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Yaacob (Mas)

Apr 23 - Riyadh
Al-Nassr 2 (Asiri 54, Hamdallah 85)
Foolad 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Qasim (Irq)

Apr 26 - Riyadh
Al-Nassr 1 (Hamdallah 90+5 pen)
Al-Wehdat 2 (Zreik 44, N'Diaye 72)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Abdulnabi (Bhr)

Apr 26 - Riyadh
Foolad 0
Al-Sadd 1 (Tae-hee 64)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Shaban (Kuw)

Apr 29 - Riyadh
Al-Wehdat 1 (Saad 27)
Foolad 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Sabah (Irq)

Apr 29 - Riyadh
Al-Sadd 1 (Cazorla 83 pen)
Al-Nassr 2 (Hamdallah 33, Al-Amri 74)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Tufayelieh (Syr)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al-Nassr	6	3	2	1	9	5	11
Al-Sadd	6	3	1	2	9	7	10
Al-Wehdat	6	2	1	3	4	7	7
Foolad	6	1	2	3	3	6	5

Group E

Apr 14 - Margao
Persepolis 1 (Hosseini 40)
Al-Wahda 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Kimura (Jpn)

Apr 14 - Margao
Goa 0
Al-Rayyan 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Nasaruddin (Mas)

Apr 17 - Margao
Al-Wahda 0
Goa 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Alili (UAE)

Apr 17 - Margao
Al-Rayyan 1 (Al-Hadhrami 19)
Persepolis 3 (Kamyabinia 47, Moghanlou 49, 57)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Tantashev (Uzb)

Apr 20 - Margao
Al-Wahda 3 (Ayedh 66, Ibrahim 85, Jumaa 90+5)
Al-Rayyan 2 (Khalilzadeh 13, Hatem 54)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Nasaruddin (Mas)

Apr 20 - Margao
Persepolis 2 (Torabi 18 pen, Hosseini 24)
Goa 1 (Bedia 14)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Hattab (Syr)

Apr 23 - Margao
Al-Rayyan 0
Al-Wahda 1 (Kharbin 71)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Alili (UAE)

Apr 23 - Margao
Goa 0
Persepolis 4 (Moghanlou 24, Torabi 43 pen, Alekasir 47, Kamyabinia 58)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Kimura (Jpn)

Apr 26 - Margao
Al-Wahda 1 (Matavz 5)
Persepolis 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Tantashev (Uzb)

Apr 26 - Margao
Al-Rayyan 1 (Ferydoon 89)
Goa 1 (Ortiz 3)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Hattab (Syr)

Apr 29 - Margao
Persepolis 4 (Moghanlou 27, Pahlavan 33, Kanaanizadegan 68, Alekasir 73)
Al-Rayyan 2 (Boli 48, 72)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Kimura (Jpn)

Apr 29 - Margao
Goa 0
Al-Wahda 2 (Kharbin 61, Al-Menhali 90)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Mahfoodh (Bhr)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Persepolis	6	5	0	1	14	5	15
Al-Wahda	6	4	1	1	7	3	13
Goa	6	0	3	3	2	9	3
Al-Rayyan	6	0	2	4	6	12	2

AFRICA

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2020-21

Group A

Apr 3 - Dar es Salaam
Simba 4 (Miquissone 30, Chama 45+1, 84, Bwalya 66)
Vita Club 1 (Soze 32)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Guirat (Tun)

Apr 3 - Omdurman
Al Merrikh 2 (Agab 26, Bakhit 36)
Al Ahly 2 (Banoun 81 pen, Ibrahim 90+4)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Bamlak (Eth)

Apr 9 - Cairo
Al Ahly 1 (Sherif 32)
Simba 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ghorbal (Alg)

Apr 9 - Kinshasa
Vita Club 3 (Mangoba 9, Kalala 52, Tulenge 80)
Al Merrikh 1 (Edjomariegwe 31)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Bouh (Mtn)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Simba	6	4	1	1	9	2	13
Al Ahly	6	3	2	1	11	5	11
Vita Club	6	2	1	3	10	12	7
Al Merrikh	6	0	2	4	4	15	2

Group B

Apr 2 - Omdurman
Al Hilal Omdurman 0
Mamelodi Sundowns 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Sikazwe (Zam)

Apr 2 - Algiers
Belouizdad 2 (Sayoud 84, Bechou 86)
TP Mazembe 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Banna (Egy)

Apr 9 - Lubumbashi
TP Mazembe 2 (Beya 18, Tshibangu 76)
Al Hilal Omdurman 1 (Mugadam 2)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ndabihawenimana (Bdi)

Apr 9 - Pretoria
Mamelodi Sundowns 0
Belouizdad 2 (Sayoud 29, Gasmi 45)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Bondo (Bot)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mamelodi Sundowns	6	4	1	1	10	4	13
Belouizdad	6	2	3	1	6	6	9
TP Mazembe	6	1	2	3	3	6	5
Al Hilal Omdurman	6	0	4	2	2	5	4

Group C

Apr 3 - Luanda
Petro de Luanda 0
Horoya 1 (Camara 2)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Atcho (Gab)

Apr 3 - Johannesburg
Kaizer Chiefs 1 (Parker 48)
Wydad Casablanca 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Din (Egypt)

Apr 10 - Casablanca
Wydad Casablanca 2 (Karti 15, Ounajem 22)
Petro de Luanda 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Mutaz (Lby)

Apr 10 - Conakry
Horoya 2 (Barry 45+2, Camara 69)
Kaizer Chiefs 2 (Cardoso 67 pen, Billiat 76)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Gassama (Gam)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wydad Casablanca	6	4	1	1	9	1	13
Kaizer Chiefs	6	2	3	1	5	6	9
Horoya	6	2	3	1	5	4	9
Petro de Luanda	6	0	1	5	0	8	1

Group D

Apr 3 - Thies
Teungueth 2 (Niang 38, Diop 72)
Esperance 1 (Romdhane 28)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ngwa (Cmr)

Apr 3 - Algiers
MC Alger 0
Zamalek 2 (Obama 7, Shikabala 33)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Jaafari (Mar)

Apr 10 - Rades
Esperance 1 (Khalifa 31)
MC Alger 1 (Belkheir 68)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Gomes (Rsa)

Apr 10 - Cairo
Zamalek 4 (Wensh 16, 41, Hamdy 25, 38)
Teungueth 1 (Sakho 48)
HT: 4-0. **Ref:** Keita (Mli)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Esperance	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
MC Alger	6	2	3	1	4	4	9
Zamalek	6	2	2	2	7	5	8
Teungueth	6	1	1	4	4	9	4

Quarter-Finals - Leg 1

May 14 - Algiers
MC Alger 1 (Rebiai 83)
Wydad Casablanca 1 (Jabrane 66 pen)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Weyesa (Eth)

May 15 - Cairo
Al Ahly 2 (Taher 23, Mohsen 89)
Mamelodi Sundowns 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** N'Diaye (Sen)

May 15 - Algiers
Belouizdad 2 (Draoui 35, Sayoud 82)
Esperance 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ngambo (Cod)

May 15 - Johannesburg
Kaizer Chiefs 4 (Mathoho 6, Nurkovic 34, 57, Castro 63)
Simba 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Alioum (Cmr)

Quarter-Finals - Leg 2

May 22 - Casablanca
Wydad Casablanca 1 (2) (El Karti 90+2)
MC Alger 0 (1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bondo (Bot)

May 22 - Pretoria
Mamelodi Sundowns 1 (1) (Lebusa 30)
Al Ahly 1 (3) (Ibrahim 11)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Sikazwe (Zam)

May 22 - Rades
Esperance 2 (2)* (Benguit 68, Romdhane 87)
Belouizdad 0 (2)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Gassama (Gam)
**Esperance win 3-2 on penalties*

May 22 - Dar es Salaam
Simba 3 (3) (Bocco 24, 56, Chama 86)
Kaizer Chiefs 0 (4)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ndabihawenimana (Bdi)

CONCACAF

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE 2020-21

Round of 16 - Leg 1

Apr 6 - San Pedro Sula
Marathon 2 (Castillo 39, Ramirez 68)
Portland Timbers 2 (Mora 35, Torres 59 og)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ramos (Mex)

Apr 7 - Santo Domingo
Arcahaie 0
Cruz Azul 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ward (Skn)

Apr 7 - San Jose
Saprissa 0
Philadelphia Union 1 (Przybylko 34)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Cornejo (Slv)

Apr 7 - Alajuela
Alajuelense 0
Atlanta United 1 (Barco 50 pen)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Martinez (Hon)

Apr 8 - Leon
Leon 1 (Navarro 25)
Toronto 1 (Mosquera 51 og)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Montero (Crc)

Apr 8 - Tegucigalpa
Olimpia 1 (Arboleda 89)
Club America 2 (Vinas 41, Diaz 44)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Elfath (USA)

Apr 9 - Santo Domingo
Atletico Pantoja 0
Monterrey 3 (Janssen 32, Gonzalez 42, Alvarado 70)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Nation (Jam)

Apr 9 - Managua
Real Esteli 0
Columbus Crew 4 (Zardes 19, 33, Mensah 26, Santos 45+1 pen)
HT: 0-4. **Ref:** Brown (Hon)

Round of 16 - Leg 2

Apr 13 - Kennesaw
Atlanta United 1 (2) (Damm 90+1)
Alajuelense 0 (0)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Escobedo (Mex)

Apr 14 - Portland
Portland Timbers 5 (7) (Chara 19, 36, 79, Valeri 66, Loria 89)
Marathon 0 (2)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Barton (Slv)

Apr 14 - Mexico City
Cruz Azul 8 (8) (Gutierrez 3, Yotun 11, Hernandez 25, Montoya 49, 64, Reyes 61, Escobar 69, Angulo 76)
Arcahaie 0 (0)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Torres (Pur)

Apr 14 - Bay Lake
Toronto 2 (3) (Mullins 55, Morrow 72)
Leon 1 (2) (Navarro 80)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Pitti (Pan)

Apr 15 - Chester
Philadelphia Union 4 (5) (Monteiro 47 pen, 90, Przybylko 51, Fontana 55)
Saprissa 0 (0)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Guerrero (Mex)

Apr 15 - Mexico City
Club America 0 (2)*
Olimpia 1 (Bengtson 50)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bejarano (Crc)
*Club America win on away goals

Apr16 - Columbus
Columbus Crew 1 (5) (Wright-Phillips 86)
Real Esteli 0 (0)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Herrera (Crc)

Apr 16 - Monterrey
Monterrey 3 (6) (Sanchez 9, Janssen 14, Gallardo 79)
Atletico Pantoja 1 (1) (Cabrera 61)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Fischer (Can)

Quarter-Finals - Leg 1

Apr 28 - Tampa
Toronto 1 (Osorio 20)
Cruz Azul 3 (Angulo 3, 34, Aguilar 58)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Montero (Crc)

Apr 28 - Atlanta
Atlanta United 0
Philadelphia Union 3 (Przybylko 57, 73, Fontana 86)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Marrufo (USA)

Apr 29 - Columbus
Columbus Crew 2 (Valenzuela 66, Zelarayan 87)
Monterrey 2 (Loba 9, Alvarado 90+3)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Calderon (Crc)

Apr 29 - Portland
Portland Timbers 1 (Mora 90+7)
Club America 1 (Martinez 45+1 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Escobar (Gua)

Quarter-Finals - Leg 2

May 5 - Mexico City
Cruz Azul 1 (4) (Angulo 28)
Toronto 0 (1)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Martinez (Hon)

May 5 - Chester
Philadelphia Union 1 (4) (Przybylko 88)
Atlanta United 1 (1) (Sosa 45+2)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Villarreal (USA)

May 6 - Monterrey
Monterrey 3 (5) (Meza 3, 26, Layun 71)
Columbus Crew 0 (2)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Parchment (Jam)

May 6 - Mexico City
Club America 3 (4) (Vinas 21, 59 pen, Suarez 70)
Portland Timbers 1 (2) (Valeri 64 pen)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Barton (Slv)

Internationals

2022 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

EUROPE section

● *13 finals places available*

Group A

Mar 30 - Baku
Azerbaijan 1 (Mahmudov 59 pen)
Serbia 2 (Mitrovic 16, 81)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Reinshreiber (Isr)

Azerbaijan: Mahammadaliyev - A. Huseynov, B. Huseynov, Medvedev, Badalov, Krivotsyuk, Mahmudov, Ibrahimli, Salahli (Xalilzade 72), Nuriev (Emreli 69; Jafarguliyev 79), Ghorbani (Seydaev 69).
Serbia: Rajkovic - S. Mitrovic, Spajic, Pavlovic, Gudelj, Kostic (Zivkovic 64), Radonjic (Ristic 86), Milinkovic-Savic, Maksimovic (Grujic 64), Tadic (Jovic 75), A. Mitrovic (Vlahovic 86).

Mar 30 - Luxembourg
Luxembourg 1 (Rodrigues 30)
Portugal 3 (Jota 45+2, Ronaldo 50, Palhinha 80)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ivanov (Rus)
Luxembourg: Moris - Gerson, Chanot, Jans, Pinto (M. Martins 66), C. Martins (Skenderovic 87), O. Thill (S. Thill 58), Barreiro, Rodrigues, Sinani (Muratovic 87), V. Thill (Deville 58).
Sent off: Chanot 86.
Portugal: Lopes - Cancelo, Fonte, Dias, Mendes, Neves (Oliveira 89), Sanches, B. Silva (Palhinha 68), Ronaldo, Jota (R. Silva 68), Felix (Neto 41).

Group B

Mar 31 - Thessaloniki
Greece 1 (Kakabadze 76 og)
Georgia 1 (Kvaratskhelia 78)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)
Greece: Vlachodimos - Papadopoulos, Tzavellas, Bakakis (Mavrias 42), Giannoulis, Fortounis, Zeca, Bouchalakis (Siopis 87), Bakasetas (Masouras 71), Pavlidis (Giakoumakis 71), Tzolis (Limnios 46).
Georgia: Loria - Kashia, Kakabadze, Dvali, Glorbelidze, Kankava, Aburjania (Gvilia 74), Lobzhanidze (Jighauri 84), Kiteishvili (Kvekveskiri 84), Kvaratskhelia, Zivzivadze (Kvilitaia 63).

Mar 31 - Sevilla
Spain 3 (Olmo 34, Torres 36, Moreno 75)
Kosovo 1 (Halimi 70)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Kehlet (Den)
Spain: Simon - M. Llorente, Martinez, Garcia (Ramos 86), Alba, Busquets (Rodri 82), Koke, Olmo (Canales 82), Morata (Moreno 69), F. Torres, Pedri (Ruiz 69).
Kosovo: Ujkani - Aliti, Hadergjonaj, Vojvoda, Dresevic, Kryeziu, Halimi (Voca 82), Celina, Kololli (Zeneli 57), Rashica (Kastrati 55), Muriqi.

Group C

Mar 31 - Vilnius
Lithuania 0
Italy 2 (Sensi 47, Immobile 90+4 pen)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Raczkowski (Pol)
Lithuania: Svedkauskas - Mikoliunas (Gaspuitis 74), Vaitkunas, Girdvainis, Beneta, Novikovas, Dapkus, Slivka, Simkus (Petravicius 83), Sirgedas (Eliosius 58), Cernych (Kazlauskas 74).
Italy: Donnarumma - Toloi, Emerson (Spinazzola 56), Mancini, Bastoni (Acerbi 89), Pessina (Barella 62), Locatelli, Pellegrini (Sensi 46), El Shaarawy (Chiesa 46), Immobile, Bernardeschi.

Mar 31 - Belfast
Northern Ireland 0
Bulgaria 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Frid (Isr)
Northern Ireland: Peacock-Farrell - Dallas, Evans, Cathcart, Ballard (Smith 74), Lewis, Davis, McNair, Saville (Kennedy 74), Whyte (McGinn 64), Magennis (Lafferty 82).
Bulgaria: Naumov - P. Hristov, Antov, A. Hristov, Tsvetanov (Zanev 73), Kostadinov (Vitanov 44), Chochev, Vutov (D. Iliev 46), Yomov (Karagaren 73), Galabinov (A. Iliev), Despodov.

Group D

Mar 31 - Sarajevo
Bosnia & Herzegovina 0
France 1 (Griezmann 60)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Sehic - Ahmedhodzic, Kolasinac, Sanicanin, Todorovic (Stevanovic 77), Pjanic, Cimirot (Gojak 86), Krunic (Previljak 86), Hadziahmetovic, Hadzikadunic, Dzeko.
France: Lloris - Pavard, Varane, Kimpembe, Hernandez, Pogba, Lemar (Sissoko 90), Rabiot, Griezmann, Coman (Giroud 59), Mbappe.

Mar 31 - Kiev
Ukraine 1 (Yaremchuk 20)
Kazakhstan 1 (Muzhikov 59)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Jug (Svn)
Ukraine: Trubin - Kryvtsov, Karavayev (Tymchyk 87), Matviyenko, Mykhaylichenko, Sydorchuk (Marlos 67), Malinovskyi, Zinchenko, Shaparenko (Dovbyk 81), Moraes (Zubkov 67), Yaremchuk.
Kazakhstan: Pokatilov - Maliy, Dosmagambetov (Bystrov 46), Marochkin, Alip, Nurgaliev (Tungyshbayev 87), Muzhikov, Tagybergen (Orazov 46), Valiullin, Abiken (Vorogovskiy 46), Aymbetov (Karimov 60).

Group E

Mar 30 - Heverlee
Belgium 8 (Batshuayi 14, Vanaken 17, 89, Trossard 38, 75, Doku 42, Praet 49, Benteke 70)
Belarus 0
HT: 4-0. **Ref:** Rumsas (Ltu)
Belgium: Mignolet - Alderweireld, Denayer (Boyata 46), Vertonghen (Dendoncker 64), Meunier, Praet (Tielemans 71), Vanaken, T. Hazard, Trossard, Batshuayi (Benteke 64), Doku (Januzaj 77).
Belarus: Gutor - Polyakov, Naumov, Pavlovets, Yuzepchuk, Stasevich, Kislyak (Maevskiy 61), Kendysh (Bakhar 87), Podstrelov (Signevich 46), Ebong (Savitskiy 46), Lisakovich (Klimovich 75).

Mar 30 - Cardiff
Wales 1 (James 81)
Czech Republic 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hategan (Rou)
Wales: Ward - Lawrence, Mepham (Moore 56), Rodon, Roberts, Ampadu, Morrell, N. Williams, James, Wilson (J. Williams 76), Bale.
Sent off: Roberts 77.
Czech Republic: Vaclik - Coufal (Vydra 87), Kudela (Barak 87), Celustka, Boril, Darida, Holes (Krmencik 53), Provod (Kaderabek 82), Soucek, Jankto (Masopust 82), Schick. *Sent off: Schick 48.*

Group F

Mar 31 - Vienna
Austria 0
Denmark 4 (Olsen 58, 73, Maehle 63, Hojbjerg 67)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Dias (Por)
Austria: A. Schlager - Dragovic, Alaba, Trauner (Posch 82), Lainer, Ulmer (Friedl 82), Ilsanker (Lazaro 65), Sabitzer, X. Schlager, Baumgartner, Kalajdzic (Grbic 82).
Denmark: Schmeichel - Wass (Larsen 77), Kjaer, Christensen, Maehle, Delaney (Norgaard 77), Eriksen, Hojbjerg, Braithwaite (Dolberg 77), Poulsen (Olsen 55), Wind (Andersen 65).

Mar 31 - Chisinau
Moldova 1 (Carp 29)
Israel 4 (Zahavi 45+1, Solomon 57, Dabour 64, Natcho 66)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Pandzic (Swe)
Moldova: Koselev - Epureanu, Armas, Bolohan (Dumbravanu 79), Jardan, Reabciuk, Cojocari (Cotogoi 73), Rata (Iosipoi 79), Carp (Dragan 62), Platica, Nicolaescu. *Sent off: Nicolaescu 50.*
Israel: Marciano - Tibi (Hanna 70), Taha (Fani 58), Dasa (Haziza 70), Menachem (Lavi 46), Arad, Natcho, Peretz, Solomon, Zahavi (Weissman 79), Dabour.

Mar 31 - Glasgow
Scotland 4 (McGinn 7, 53, Adams 60, Fraser 70)
Faroe Islands 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Cann (Mlt)
Scotland: Gordon - McTominay, Hanley, Tierney (McKenna 79), Fraser (Palmer 79), Robertson, McLean, McGregor (Fleck 73), McGinn, Adams (McBurnie 73), Dykes (Nisbet 68).
Faroe Islands: Nielsen - Davidsen, Nattestad (Baldvinsson 76), Edmundsson (Vatnsdal 76), S. Vatnhamar (Johannesen 69), Hansson, Hendriksson, M. Olsen (Jonsson 58), G. Vatnhamar, Andreasen (K. Olsen 69), Rolantsson.

Group G

Mar 30 - Gibraltar
Gibraltar 0
Netherlands 7 (Berghuis 41, De Jong 55, Depay 61, 88, Wijnaldum 62, Malen 64, Van de Beek 85)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Pinheiro (Por)
Gibraltar: Coleing (Goldwin 74) - Wiseman, Mouelhi, Jolley (Moulds 82), Chipolina, Annesley (Torrilla 73), Walker, Sergeant, Ronan (Barnett 41), Casciaro (Valarino 82), De Barr.
Netherlands: Krul - Dumfries (Gravenberch 46), Blind (Malen 54), De Ligt, Wijndal, Wijnaldum, Klaassen (Van de Beek 77), F. De Jong, L. De Jong (Babel 81), Berghuis (Stengs 81), Depay.

Mar 30 - Podgorica
Montenegro 0
Norway 1 (Sorloth 35)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)
Montenegro: Mijatovic - Tomasevic, Savic, Vujacic, Marusic (Beciraj 88), Scekic, Kosovic (Ivanovic 80), Lagator (Jovovic 63), Durdevic (Islamovic 63) Haksabanovic (Boljevic 81), Jovetic.
Norway: Jarstein - Svensson (Ryerson 66), Gregersen, Meling, Ajer, Elyounoussi (Strandberg 90), Thorsby, Berg (Midtsjo 67), Odegaard (Linnes 81), Sorloth, Haaland (King 80).

Mar 30 - Istanbul
Turkey 3 (Karaman 2, Calhanoglu 33, Yilmaz 52 pen)
Latvia 3 (Savalnieks 35, Uldrikis 58, D. Ikaunieks 79)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Stefanski (Pol)
Turkey: Cakir - Muldur, Kabak, Soyuncu, Erkin (Kokcu 83), Yokuslu, Calhanoglu (Meras 66), Tufan (Turuc 83), Yazici (Antalyali 66), Yilmaz, Karaman (Unal 73).
Latvia: Steinbors - Oss, Cernomordijs, Tobers, Jurkovskis, Savalnieks (Jaunzems 90+4), J. Ikaunieks (D. Ikaunieks 65), Ciganiks (Kamess 46), Emsis, Fjodorovs, Uldrikis (Krollis 73).

Group H

Mar 30 - Nicosia
Cyprus 1 (Pittas 42)
Slovenia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ekberg (Swe)
Cyprus: Michael - Laifis, Soteriou, Ioannou, Kousoulos, Artymatas (Gogic 90+3), Kastanos (Kyriakou 60), Papoulis (Loizou 82), Sotiriou (Ilia 90+3), Antoniou, Pittas.
Slovenia: Oblak - Blazic, Balkovec (Kouter 81), Stojanovic, Bajric, Ilicic, Kurtic, Zajc (Bohar 46), Lovric (Zahovic 81), Bijol (Crnigoj 58), Kramer (Vuckic 58).

Mar 30 - Rijeka
Croatia 3 (Perisic 62, Modric 76 pen, Brekalo 90)
Malta 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Tschudi (Sui)
Croatia: Livakovic - Juranovic, Vida, Caleta-Car, Melnjak (Barisic 57), Badelj (Modric 54), Kovacic, Pasalic (Brekalo 54), Vlasic, Budimir (Perisic 54), Orsic (Lovric 78).
Malta: Bonello - Borg (Muscat 67), Pepe, Kristensen (Gambin 81), Camenzuli, Teuma, Guillaumier, Mbong (Corbalan 67), Shaw, Pisani (Grech 63), Satariano (Nwoko 46).

Mar 30 - Trnava
Slovakia 2 (Skriniar 38, Mak 74)
Russia 1 (Fernandes 71)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Cerro (Esp)
Slovakia: Kuciak - Pekarik (Pauschek 90+2), Satka, Skriniar, Hubocan, Koscelnik, Kucka, Mak (Duris 76), Duda, Hromada (Hrosovsky 61), Schranz (Strelec 90+2).
Russia: Shunin - Fernandes, Semyenov, Dzhikiya, Kudryashov, Zhirkov (Mostovoy 46; Sobolev 65), Ozdoev, Kuzyaev, Golovin, Dzyuba, Zhemaletdinov (Al. Miranchuk 58).

Group I

Mar 31 - Andorra la Vella
Andorra 1 (Pujol 90+3 pen)
Hungary 4 (Fiola 45+2, Gazdag 51, Kleinheisler 58, Nego 90)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Thorarinsson (Isl)
Andorra: Gomes - Garcia, Vales, San Nicolas (Rubio 61), Llovera, Cervos, Alavedra (Rebes 77), Vieira (Pujol 77), Alaez, A. Martinez (C. Martinez 62), Cucu (Sanchez 82).
Hungary: Dibusz - Fiola, Lovrencsics (Varga 83), Lang, Hangya, At. Szalai, Kleinheisler (Nego 83), Kalmar (Gazdag 29), Nagy (Siger 61), Nikolic (Varga 61), Ad. Szalai.

Mar 31 - London
England 2 (Kane 19 pen, Maguire 85)
Poland 1 (Moder 58)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Kuipers (Ned)
England: Pope - Walker, Maguire, Stones, Chilwell, Mount, Phillips, Rice, Foden (James 86), Kane (Calvert-Lewin 89), Sterling (Lingard 90).
Poland: Szczesny - Bereszynski, Bednarek, Helik (Jozwiak 54), Glik, Rybus (Reca 86), Krychowiak, Zielinski (Grosicki 86), Moder, Piatek (Augustyniak 76), Swiderski (Milik 46).

Mar 31 - Serravalle
San Marino 0
Albania 2 (Manaj 63, Uzuni 85)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Steen (Nor)
San Marino: Benedettini - Simoncini, Palazzi (Ceccaroli 80), Battistini (D'Addario 80), Fabbri, Rossi (Brolli 55), Golinucci (Grandoni 64),

Mularoni, Berardi, Nanni, Tomassini (Lunadei 55).
Albania: Strakosha - Lenjani (Mitaj 88), Veseli, Hysaj, Djimsiti, Ajeti, Laci (Uzuni 46), Bare, Manaj (Cikalleshi 87), Ramadani, Broja (Roshi 46).

Group J

Mar 31 - Yerevan
Armenia 3 (Spertsyan 56, Haroyan 86, Barseghyan 89 pen)
Romania 2 (Cicaldau 62, 72)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Treimanis (Lva)
Armenia: Yurchenko - Hambardzumyan, Calisir, Haroyan, Hovhannisyan, Grigoryan, Bayramyan, Muradyan (Spertsyan 46), Karapetyan (Shaghoyan 46), Barseghyan (Udo 90+2), Briasco (Adamyan 46).
Romania: Nita - Chiriches, Tosca, Bancu, Mogos, Stanciu (Tanase 73), Maxim (Keseru 73), Marin, Cicaldau (Cretu 81), Puscas, Man (Mihaila 81).
Sent off: Puscas 78.

Mar 31 - Duisburg
Germany 1 (Gundogan 63 pen)
North Macedonia 2 (Pandev 45+2, Elmas 85)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)
Germany: Ter Stegen - Rudiger, Ginter (Musiala 89), Can, Sane, Gosens (Younes 56), Gundogan, Goretzka, Kimmich, Havertz (Werner 56), Gnabry.
North Macedonia: Dimitrievski - Ristovski, Musliu, Velkovski, Alioski (Ristevski 90), Ademi, Nikolov (Bejtulai 59), Bardhi, Elmas, Pandev (Stojanovski 90), Trajkovski (Spirovski 72).

Mar 31 - Vaduz
Liechtenstein 1 (Frick 79)
Iceland 4 (Saevarsson 12, Bjarnason 45, Palsson 77, Sigurjonsson 90+4 pen)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Al Hakim (Swe)
Liechtenstein: Ospelt - Kaufmann, Yildiz (Brandle 46), Goppel, Hofer (Marxer 78), Buchel (Frommelt 69), S. Wolfinger, Sele (F. Wolfinger 69), Meier, Y. Frick, N. Frick (Ospelt 84).
Iceland: Runarsson - Saevarsson, Magnusson, Ingason, Hermannsson, Bjarnason (Thorsteinsson 72), Gunnarsson (Sigurjonsson 46), Palsson, Gudmundsson (Sigurdsson 63), Traustason (Johannesson 81), Gudjohnsen (Fridjonsson 63).

CONCACAF section

● *3.5 finals places available*

Group A

Mar 31 - St. George's
Grenada 1 (Lewis 33)
US Virgin Islands 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Johnson (Guy)

Group B

Mar 31 - Bradenton
Bermuda 5 (Crichlow 36, 80, Bather, 40, Leverock 57, Scott 64)
Aruba 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Bonilla (Slv)

Group C

Mar 30 - Willemstad
St. Vincent & Grenadines 3 (Anderson 10, Sam 20, Solomon 86)
British Virgin Islands 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Bejarano (Crc)

Group D

Mar 31 - Santo Domingo
Barbados 1 (Saimovici 81)
Anguilla 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Robles (Mex)

Group E

Mar 30 - San Cristobal
Belize 5 (Bernardez 45+3, 48, August 47, Nembhard 81, McCaulay 90+1)
Turks & Caicos Islands 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Saghafi (USA)

Group F

Mar 30 - Santo Domingo
Guyana 4 (Vancooten 8, Daniel 54, Glasgow 75, Welshman 81)
Bahamas 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Reyna (Gua)

2021 AFCON QUALIFICATION

Group A

Mar 28 - Windhoek
Namibia 2 (Shalulile 45+2, 77)
Guinea 1 (Kane 17)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Matemera (Zim)

Mar 28 - Bamako
Mali 3* *(awarded)*
Chad 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mali	6	4	1	1	10	4	13
Guinea	6	3	2	1	8	5	11
Namibia	6	3	0	3	8	7	9
Chad	6	0	1	5	2	12	1

Group B

Mar 29 - Blantyre
Malawi 1 (Mbulu 15)
Uganda 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Alvacao (Moz)

Mar 29 - Ouagadougou
Burkina Faso 1 (Traore 49)
South Sudan 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Rogers (Lbr)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burkina Faso	6	3	3	0	6	2	12
Malawi	6	3	1	2	4	5	10
Uganda	6	2	2	2	3	2	8
South Sudan	6	1	0	5	2	6	3

Group C

Mar 28 - Omdurman
Sudan 2 (Bakhit 5, Abdelrahman 32)
South Africa 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Carvalho (Ang)

Mar 28 - Accra
Ghana 3 (Opoku 12, Ayew 31 pen, Rahman 60)
Sao Tome e Principe 1 (Iniesta 83)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Djama (Dji)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana	6	4	1	1	9	3	13
Sudan	6	4	0	2	9	3	12
South Africa	6	3	1	2	8	7	10
Sao Tome e Principe	6	0	0	6	3	16	0

Group D

Mar 29 - Luanda
Angola 2 (Show 63, Augusto 69)
Gabon 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Grisha (Egy)

Mar 29 - Kinshasa
DR Congo 1 (Kasengu 45+2 pen)
Gambia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Omar (Egy)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gambia	6	3	1	2	9	7	10
Gabon	6	3	1	2	8	6	10
DR Congo	6	2	3	1	4	5	9
Angola	6	1	1	4	4	7	4

Group E

Mar 30 - Bangui
Central African Republic 0
Mauritania 1 (Kamara 45+4)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Mahamat (Cha)

Mar 30 - Rabat
Morocco 1 (Munir 45)
Burundi 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ngwa (Cmr)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco	6	4	2	0	10	1	14
Mauritania	6	2	3	1	5	4	9
Burundi	6	1	2	3	6	10	5
Central African Rep	6	1	1	4	5	11	4

Group F

Mar 30 - Douala
Cameroon 0
Rwanda 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Moussa (Nig)

Mar 30 - Maputo
Mozambique 0
Cape Verde 1 (Bangal 58 og)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Nkounkou (Cgo)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cameroon	6	3	2	1	8	4	11
Cape Verde	6	2	4	0	6	3	10
Rwanda	6	1	3	2	1	3	6
Mozambique	6	1	1	4	5	10	4

Group G

Mar 29 - Cairo
Egypt 4 (Elneny 15, Sherif 17, Salah 21, 25)
Comoros 0
HT: 4-0. **Ref:** Traore (Mli)

Mar 29 - Lome
Togo 1 (Eninful 90+5)
Kenya 2 (Abdallah 32, Juma 66 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Coker (Sle)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	6	3	3	0	10	3	12
Comoros	6	2	3	1	4	6	9
Kenya	6	1	4	1	7	7	7
Togo	6	0	2	4	3	8	2

Group H

Mar 29 - Blida
Algeria 5 (Mandi 24, Feghouli 58, Mahrez 64 pen, Bounedjah 72, Boulaya 88)
Botswana 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ouattara (Bfa)

Mar 29 - Harare
Zimbabwe 0
Zambia 2 (Daka 21, 90+2)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Retselisitsoe (Les)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria	6	4	2	0	19	6	14
Zimbabwe	6	2	2	2	6	8	8
Zambia	6	2	1	3	8	12	7
Botswana	6	1	1	4	2	9	4

Group I

Mar 30 - Thies
Senegal 1 (Kouyate 90+6)
Eswatini 1 (Gamedze 9)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Toure (Gui)

Mar 30 - Bissau
Guinea-Bissau 3 (Piqueti 45+1, Mendy 73, Jorginho 80)
Congo 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Attiogbe (Tog)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal	6	4	2	0	10	2	14
Guinea-Bissau	6	3	0	3	9	7	9
Congo	6	2	2	2	5	5	8
Eswatini	6	0	2	4	3	13	2

Group J

Mar 28 - Rades
Tunisia 2 (Jaziri 4, Akapo 52 og)
Equatorial Guinea 1 (Chaouat 88 og)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ndala (Cod)

Mar 28 - Dar es Salaam
Tanzania 1 (Msuva 45+2)
Libya 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Hagi (Som)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tunisia	6	5	1	0	14	5	16
Equatorial Guinea	6	3	0	3	7	7	9
Tanzania	6	2	1	3	5	6	7
Libya	6	1	0	5	7	15	3

Group K

Mar 30 - Abidjan
Ivory Coast 3 (Boly 3, Kessie 19 pen, Kouassi 76)
Ethiopia 1 (Kebede 74)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Bulu (Gha)

Mar 30 - Toamasina
Madagascar 0
Niger 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Otogo-Castane (Gab)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	6	4	1	1	11	5	13
Ethiopia	6	3	0	3	10	6	9
Madagascar	6	2	2	2	9	9	8
Niger	6	1	1	4	3	13	4

Group L

Mar 30 - Lagos
Nigeria 3 (Osimhen 23, Etebo 50, Onuachu 83)
Lesotho 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Duarte (Cpv)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	6	4	2	0	14	7	14
Benin	5	2	1	2	3	3	7
Sierra Leone	5	0	4	1	5	6	4
Lesotho	6	0	3	3	3	9	3

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Gary Lineker

England 3 Poland 0

1986 World Cup, Mexico

As Gary Lineker led England onto a bobbly pitch in Monterrey in June 1986, his life was about to change forever. With his country's World Cup dream close to breaking point, Lineker stepped up as the saviour of Bobby Robson's team...

Hat-trick hero... Lineker celebrates scoring against Poland

"I don't remember too many games that I played in; that's the truth. Often, one of my goals will pop up on Twitter and unless it was one of the rare times I got one from outside the box or a really important goal, I will look at it and have no recollection. It will be like seeing it for the first time.

I don't recall too much about my international debut, and as for my first England goal against the Republic of Ireland, I just about remember a chipped finish at Wembley. My first *Clasico* as a Barcelona player was incredible, and winning the FA Cup semi-final against Arsenal and then the final against Nottingham Forest with Spurs in 1991 was special. But the one game that changed my life forever was against Poland in the 1986 World Cup finals.

The idea of playing in a World Cup was a dream for me, but it didn't really live up to what I imagined when I got to Mexico.

The pitches were terrible – bare in places – and the heat was oppressive, the stands were empty in a lot of the stadiums. This was not what we were expecting as England players going to a World Cup. If this was the ultimate dream, it wasn't quite living up to the billing.

Losing to Portugal and drawing with Morocco in our first two matches added to the sense that this was a nightmare unfolding before our eyes. Bryan Robson was injured, Ray Wilkins was sent off for throwing the ball at the referee and I injured my wrist.

In truth, Bobby Robson could have dropped me for the Poland game. I had not played well in the first two matches and the media were calling for changes. But he stuck with me and it was the last chance for all of us to deliver: lose again and we were going home in disgrace.

I remember walking out of the tunnel and the heat was incredible. I just turned around and went back in. It was not a great environment to try to save a World Cup, but the first goal went in for me, then the second, then the third.

A World Cup hat-trick, a big win and suddenly everything around the squad changed. The atmosphere lifted, the pressure disappeared and we were on our way to the knockout stages.

That was ground zero for my career.

Rapid fire... Lineker's three goals came in the opening 34 minutes

I went from being a player who was well known in England to being well known around the world. Barcelona came in to sign me after I won the Golden Boot. My Dad was happy on a number of levels – especially because he had money on me at 14/1 to finish as top scorer.

We beat Paraguay in the next round before the Argentina game that will always be remembered for one man: Diego Maradona.

Who knows what would have happened if we were not up against the greatest player I had ever seen at that point? But Maradona was just incredible that day, unstoppable. Take the handball out of the equation and his performance was just mesmeric, out of this world. He was on a different level to everyone at that World Cup.

> Playing in a World Cup was a dream for me, but it didn't really live up to what I imagined when I got to Mexico

From feeling like we were going out in the groups to coming home frustrated we hadn't won the tournament was a huge swing in emotions, but that is what the World Cup can do."

Interview by Kevin Palmer

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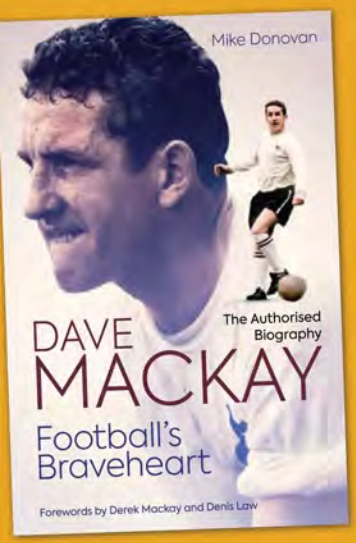

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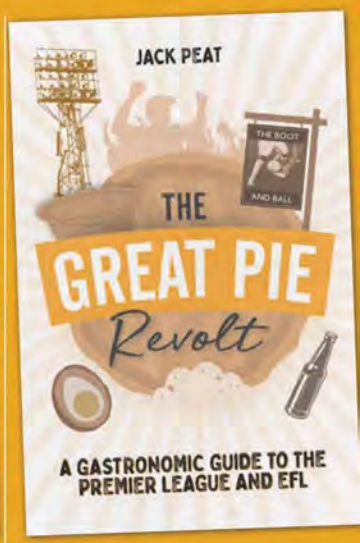
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